

**PROMISES OF PROSPERITY ACCORDING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT:
A THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL STUDY**

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not beforehand in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

Prosperity is an important theme in scripture and there is great diversity of perspectives regarding the place of wealth in the life of God's people. This diversity is reflected in the variety of theological responses to wealth in the church, but the importance of this subject is not reflected in scholarship. Attempts to develop a positive theology of prosperity that does justice to the biblical data are surprisingly rare. There is a need for a careful biblical theology of prosperity.

This study aims to lay the foundation of a fuller biblical theology, showing that conflicting biblical views of blessing, prosperity, and wealth can be unified if proper attention is given to certain roles, namely: blessing belongs within a God-man relationship defined by His grace and our dependence; the Promised Land is the exclusive environment in which blessing is promised; and blessing is not given mechanically while sin threatens, but rather the relationship must be forged through testing. This study is only the beginning of a biblical theology of prosperity, examining these roles by means of careful exegesis of four key chapters in the Old Testament from a range of bodies of literature.

Firstly, the study of Genesis 12 shows that blessing is graciously offered to Abram as God's response to the curse that accumulates through Genesis 1-11, and that blessing is intended to extend to the whole world. The blessings are based on a new God-man relationship into which Abram is called, but Abram immediately experiences the complexity of that relationship: though he acts faithfully, he meets with testing rather than prosperity, and this prompts his dependence upon God to falter.

Deuteronomy 6 emphasises that covenant faithfulness is the guardian of the God-man relationship in which blessing is found. However, covenant-keeping does not *merit* favour; the chapter puts undeserved redemption from Egypt – grace – at its centre as the motivation of obedience.

Jeremiah 32 is set in the midst of God's enactment of curses that were promised for disobedience. However, out of the nation's hopelessness, God speaks words of grace, consolation and New Covenant, a covenant in which hearts will not forget YHWH and blessing can be given unreservedly.

Finally, Psalm 128 connects wisdom language (showing that fear of YHWH is the wise way of life that brings prosperity) with priestly blessing language (focusing the eyes of the blessed on the Giver). While God prospers those who fear Him, prosperity always operates within a complex relationship of grace and dependence.

OPSOMMING

Voorspoed is 'n belangrike tema in die Bybel en daar is 'n groot verskeidenheid perspektiewe op die plek wat rykdom in die lewe van die volk van God inneem. Hierdie diversiteit word gereflekteer in die verskeidenheid van teologiese reaksies op rykdom in die kerk, maar die belang van hierdie onderwerp word nie in huidige navorsing gereflekteer nie. Pogings om 'n positiewe voorspoedsteologie te ontwikkel wat reg laat geskied aan die Bybelse gegewens is verbasend skaars. Daar is 'n behoefte aan 'n noukeurige Bybelse voorspoedsteologie.

Hierdie studie beoog om die grondslag te lê vir 'n meer omvattende Bybelse teologie, wat reg laat geskied aan die teenstrydige Bybelse beskouings oor seëning, voorspoed en rykdom deur behoorlike aandag te skenk aan bepaalde verhoudings: seëning vorm deel van 'n God-mens verhouding wat gedefinieer word deur God se genade en die mens se afhanklikheid; die Beloofde Land is die eksklusiewe omgewing waarbinne seëning beloof word; en seëning word nie outomaties verskaf wanneer sonde dreig nie, maar dit vorm deel van 'n verhouding wat deur beproewing gelouter is. Die studie is slegs die begin van 'n Bybelse voorspoedsteologie, waarvolgens die verskillende verhoudings deur middel van noukeurige eksegetiese van vier sleutelhoofstukke in die Ou Testament plaasvind.

Ten eerste, die studie van Genesis 12 toon dat seëning vanuit genade aan Abraham deur God geskenk word as 'n reaksie op die vervloeking wat in Genesis 1-11 opgebou het, en dat die seëning bedoel was om na die hele wêreld uit te brei. Die seëninge word gebaseer op 'n nuwe verhouding tussen God en mens waartoe Abram geroep is, maar dat Abram onmiddelik die ingewikkeldheid van die verhouding beleef: hoewel hy gelowig optree, ervaar hy meer beproewing as voorspoed, en dit gee aanleiding dat sy afhanklikheid van God begin wankel.

Vervolgens, Deuteronomium 6 beklemtoon dat getrouheid aan die verbond die verhouding tussen God-en-mens bewaar te midde waarvan die seëning gevind word. Tog, word die hou van die verbond nie 'n manier om guns te verdien nie; die betrokke hoofstuk plaas die onverdiende en genadige verlossing vanuit Egipte in die sentrum van die motivering van gehoorsaamheid.

Jeremia 32 word geplaas in die midde van God se uitvoering van vervloeking wat beloof was in reaksie op ongehoorsaamheid. Tog, te midde van die volk se gebrek aan hoop, spreek God sy woorde van genade, troos en 'n Nuwe Verbond, 'n verbond waarbinne JHWH nie vergeet sal word nie en waar seëning sonder voorbehoud geskenk kan word.

Ten slotte, Psalm 128 lê 'n verband tussen wysheidsuitsprake (wat aantoon dat die vrees van JHWH die verstandige lewenswyse is wat tot voorspoed lei) en priesterlike seëning bewerkstellig (wat die fokus van die geseënde op God as Gewer rig). Hoewel God voorspoed skenk aan die wie Hom vrees, funksioneer voorspoed altyd binne die komplekse verhouding van genade en afhanklikheid.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

With the wide range of disagreement in the Christian church over how prosperity should be understood and sought, there needs to be careful consideration of what the scriptures teach on the matter. It is all the more necessary for this work to be done because of the surprisingly large following that so-called Prosperity Gospel has gained throughout the Christian world for the last few decades, often on a minimal and weak biblical basis. Yet because the movements associated with Prosperity Gospel tend to be excessive, materialistic, and vulgar, and because the theologising that underpins the movements is so impoverished, it has perhaps now become a subject of ill-repute, and academia seems to have steered clear of it in recent times.

The doctrine of prosperity is a matter of some importance in Africa and in other developing regions, because it directly concerns the message of hope in the gospel. When poverty is rampant, the offer of prosperity is naturally irresistible, and yet if this offer is being made in error, it will only serve to obscure the true location of hope in the gospel. It is necessary, therefore, that the church is more involved in directly addressing this matter in more seriously biblical and theological terms. This thesis hopes to be part of that process.

It would be a research paper of its own to accurately describe the 'state of play' of prosperity theology in modern Christianity or the response to it. Nevertheless, within popular church movements it is possible to discern trends in this regard, and I do not think it is unfair to identify a twin problem within church conversations about prosperity.

Firstly, there is the weakness in the theologising in which teachers of so-called prosperity gospel are engaged. For example, Jones (1999) says,

‘Researcher Edward Pousson best stated the prosperity view on the application of the Abrahamic covenant when he wrote, “Christians are Abraham’s spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith.... This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked primarily in terms of material entitlements.” In other words, according to the prosperity gospel, the primary purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham materially. Since believers are now “Abraham’s spiritual children,” they consequently have inherited these financial blessings of the covenant.’

Prosperity teaching following this reasoning takes a true statement (that we are Abraham’s children) but recontextualises it presumptuously (Abraham’s blessings continue to be expressed materially), and applies it directly and injudiciously to Christians.

Yet secondly, the naysaying church response to prosperity teaching is also problematic, because it typically responds by pointing out the errors in the thinking of the opponents but rarely produces a positive theology of prosperity in its place. Such responses may offer positive statements about prosperity, but these are usually by way of rebuttal and not necessarily justified by a more credible theological process than the ones they criticise. For example, the same article by Jones (1999) says,

‘To support this claim [that we are heirs also of Abraham’s material blessings], prosperity teachers such as Copeland and Hagin appeal to Gal. 3:14, which says “that the blessings¹ of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus...” ... Two glaring problems need to be addressed. First, in their appeal to Gal. 3:14, prosperity teachers ignore the second half of the verse, which reads, “That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” In this verse Paul clearly was reminding the Galatians of the spiritual blessing of salvation, not the material blessing of wealth.’

Again, there is truth in pointing out that Paul particularly has the gift of the Spirit in mind, but the text nevertheless does make Christians heirs of Abrahamic blessing. What does this practically mean? Is what is meant by ‘the gift of the Spirit’ merely ‘salvation’ (a concept that Jones regards as ‘spiritual’ and seemingly therefore divorced from the material)?² What is the place of wealth for Abraham and for us? Theological statements such as Jones’ here are as presumptuous and selective as those that he aims to correct.

These sorts of problems in the church – whether of over-hasty claiming of the material benefits promised in some of the Bible’s pages or the similarly shallow denials of these blessings – may not be universal or typical enough to represent modern prosperity teaching at large, but they at least

¹ The word in Galatians 3:14 is ἡ εὐλογία, which is singular not plural.

² I have personally come across a number of teachers who ‘solve’ the problem of seeming contradiction between Old and New Testaments by considering the latter to be a ‘spiritual’ covenant, and the former to have been more physical and material; prosperity used to be a material blessing in the Old Testament, but it is now experienced as spiritual blessings. This view fails to do justice to the inextricable mix of spiritual and physical elements in both sides of the Christian Bible, and it creates more problems than it solves. This thesis hopes to describe a better solution.

serve to suggest that there is a need for more careful theological reflection on the place of prosperity in Christian theology.

That being said, this thesis does not have ambitions to tackle the prosperity movement, or even to provide a complete positive biblical theology of prosperity. The more modest aim of this research is to try to distil and evaluate the essential concepts from a few key texts within the Old Testament in the hope of solidifying an interpretive framework that is able to coherently account for the seeming diversity of ideas about and attitudes towards prosperity in scripture. Many of the Christian positions towards prosperity can only be maintained by the practice of selective reading: supporting ideas are retained and contradictory ideas are ignored. To return to the examples above, one church group listens to the first half of Galatians 3:14, another only has room for the second. The aim of this thesis is to frame prosperity in such a way that such selectiveness is not necessary – to understand prosperity in a way that explains *both* halves of 3:14.

Beyond its importance to modern church life, especially in our poverty-stricken continent, the subject of prosperity in the Old Testament is worthy of study in its own right. Firstly, as part of the umbrella of blessing, it forms part of one of the most prominent and pervasive themes in the whole of scripture. The story of Creation begins with blessing and the creation of the nation of Israel likewise begins with blessing. God's redemptive dealings with His people are motivated by these early promises to the Patriarchs, ending with hope in a new covenant of blessing. Even the wisdom literature, which shares little redemptive-historical connection with the rest of the canon, is brought into contact with it by the theme of blessing (Westermann, 1978:37). It demands attention.

Secondly, the study of prosperity in the Old Testament is intriguing because of those apparent conflicts between texts across the canon that make a coherent doctrine of prosperity so elusive. Prosperity is integral to the covenant, and much else in the Bible associates it with God's blessing. Yet on the other hand, the rich are chastised most severely for the greed and social injustice that largely motivated the northern and southern exiles, and in the New Testament, wealth is acknowledged as a root of all kinds of evil. Riches are listed among the *trials of faith*, whereas it is stated that hardship forges good character. Suffering is advanced as more characteristic of the believer's life than rest. It is not abundantly clear whether there is a unified set of presuppositions behind the affirmations and criticisms of wealth, or a plurality of competing attitudes.

The sheer number and variety of references to blessing, wealth, and prosperity of all other kinds makes it extremely difficult to discern general principles, especially without becoming dangerously reductionistic. Nevertheless, after preliminary study, it seemed possible that a biblical theology of

prosperity could at least be strengthened by correctly emphasising some undervalued propositions. These are addressed below.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

In view of the seeming multiplicity of opinions in scripture about the place and desirability of wealth and other material blessings in the life of God's people, and in view of the variety of conflicting Christian teachings that have arisen as a result, this thesis examines the following question:

**Can a consistent and coherent biblical theology of prosperity
be formulated in terms of the Old Testament?**

1.3 HYPOTHESES

This question will be examined according to the following hypotheses:

- a) The re-evaluation of the roles of the Promised Land, recompense theology, and relational dependence upon YHWH can lead to a biblical theology of prosperity.
- b) The re-evaluation of these roles can be achieved by a theological-ethical close reading of the following pericopes: Genesis 12; Deuteronomy 6; Jeremiah 32; and Psalm 128.

1.3.1 Key propositions

Hypothesis A entails an examination of the key theological-ethical presuppositions that are involved in the biblical theology of prosperity. The three mentioned in Hypothesis A are especially important, as they appear to me to have been misunderstood or undervalued in modern teaching. Below are the five main areas of theological study with regard to prosperity, as well as a brief summary of the propositions that this thesis hopes to defend:

- **The content of prosperity:**
 - Prosperity is generally a blessing, and it is offered because it is characteristic of the liberality of God and of His intentions for His good creation.
 - Prosperity is a broad concept that encompasses more than just wealth (and wealth by modern definition may be more excessive than is intended by biblical promises).
- **The ethics of prosperity:** Prosperity is intended to promote the generosity of its beneficiaries.

- **The environment of prosperity:** The Promised Land exclusively is the space within which prosperity promises operate. Prosperity may be found elsewhere, but the *promises* relate to God's land only.
- **The sphere of prosperity:** Relationship – especially characterised by God's grace and our dependence – is the sphere within which prosperity promises are made. Blessing and prosperity are descriptive of conditions in the sphere of properly ordered relationship with a liberally generous God, but prosperity is polluted by disorder in that relationship.
- **The dynamics of prosperity:** Prosperity is not awarded on a recompense basis, by merit or cause and effect. Righteousness does not bring about prosperity, and wickedness does not guarantee its absence.

An explanation of Hypothesis B is included in the Methodology section to follow.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

These hypotheses (and related propositions) will be tested by means of:

- a) exegesis of the four pericopes listed in Hypothesis B; and
- b) literature study of existing research on the topic of prosperity and research related to the biblical pericopes.

As the research question suggests, the aim of this thesis is to describe a biblical theology of prosperity that is robust and coherent, and that can account for the seeming diversity of opinions about blessing and wealth in scripture. It is sure to be apparent that exegesis of four texts is unlikely to cover sufficient ground to fully describe a biblical theology of prosperity. Thus, it is necessary that I account for this approach.

1.4.1 Rationale

As I have already said, the choice of this subject has been motivated by theologies of prosperity abroad in the church that appear to be overly selective in their use of biblical texts, or disingenuous in some other way. What is needed is a biblical theology of prosperity that can account for the diversity in scripture without having to resort to such tactics. It borders on the ironic therefore to criticise theologians of prosperity for being selective only to proceed to develop a theology on the basis of four texts. In response, I would offer the following defence of this methodology.

Firstly, the theology of prosperity that I propose in this thesis has been developed with the help of far wider thinking and reading than the four pericopes under examination here.

Secondly, while the comprehensive and systematic evaluation of every relevant passage would be a more ideal methodology, it is simply beyond the format of this research (and the energies of researcher and examiner) to pursue this ideal. Examining the selected number of texts is the compromise position, and this is reflected also in the more moderate aim of this thesis, which is merely to develop and test the beginnings of a biblical theology of prosperity in the Old Testament.

Thirdly, as will be discussed further in this chapter, the texts have been chosen for their stature in Old Testament theology and because they belong to different genres of biblical literature. The selectiveness that I have used is less about 'cherry-picking' texts for their usefulness in supporting what I believe, but rather it is about assessing the most important texts across Old Testament scripture that have relevance to the theme of prosperity.

Fourthly, while there may have been benefit in approaching this topic as a survey of the theme in as much of the Old Testament as possible, part of the reason for disagreements over prosperity theology is the shallowness with which 'proof texts' are understood. It is necessary therefore to carefully examine and defend the interpretation of key texts in order to be sure that the conclusions that we draw have not been arrived at illegitimately or in violence to their original literary and socio-historical context. Thus, while detailed exegesis of texts may not carry us far enough to properly achieve our goal, the bigger problem tends to be with depth, and the exegesis hopes to address that.

Finally, each chapter includes a section of related texts that helps to broaden the scope of the study somewhat; similarly, the final chapter will attempt to draw together what has been gained through the exegesis as well as taking soundings in other parts of scripture (particularly the New Testament) to see whether the suggested biblical-theological framework sheds light elsewhere, or just more confusion. So we shall make tentative attempts to achieve some breadth of application too.

Therefore, the limitations of this study are acknowledged, but I judge them not to be crippling. Exegesis of such a small number of texts cannot hope to be conclusive, but any findings may provide a way forward for a more comprehensive doctrinal study.

1.4.2 Reading Strategy

Because this thesis has an eye upon modern church theology and praxis, its chief concern is with the final canonical form of the text, which is most commonly recognised as the basis for Christian belief

and practice. Therefore, the exegesis of texts will be undertaken with less attention given to detailed text-critical work or to text history, and greater emphasis upon the world of the text and the meaning for the church of the texts of the agreed canon.

The process of selecting the four texts for exegesis is explained further in 1.5 and 1.6. In short, texts were chosen by a process of counting and weighing the relevance of clusters of prosperity language, and with the assistance of recent introductions to the Old Testament. The reading strategy includes:

- Translation of the relevant pericopes in conversation with text criticism
- Verse-by-verse literary interpretation, focussing on semantics, syntax, and the creative devices and techniques employed in narrative and poetry
- Analysis of literary structure
- Consideration of related texts (how these texts are selected is explained in 1.6)
- Summation of the theological-ethical conclusions derived from the study

1.4.3 Assumptions

All study takes place upon a set of assumptions, not all of which can be defended. Even when presuppositions are testable, it may be beyond the scope of the research to do so in a satisfactory manner. I will endeavour to state briefly those presuppositions of which I am aware and that seem relevant to this thesis. I apologise in advance for serious assumptions that have escaped my notice.

1. God ‘intervenes’ in history

I do not believe that setting aside faith convictions achieves greater neutrality or better interpretation of scripture than holding them. I assume that God exists and is working in the world both through apparently natural means and supernatural. Thus, I will not consider the supernatural in scripture something about which to be sceptical.

2. Unity and authority of scripture

On the basis of my belief in the power of God and statements in scripture about itself, I believe that within human authorship of scripture we hear also the Divine voice and authority. It is a consistent pattern in God’s working with the world that apparently natural events are the regular tools by which God brings about His will. As such, I believe that human words and writings that comprise our scriptures are capable of being the words also of His Spirit, and that the final form of scripture may

be ascribed to YHWH's authorship. I do not hold that the Bible is merely human testimony *about* the Word of YHWH, but that of scripture itself one is able to say, 'Thus says YHWH'.

The second important implication of the belief in the divine authorship of scripture is that it allows the possibility that there may be unity among the various witnesses involved in the composition of the Bible. The diverse range of witnesses may have left us with a multifaceted end result, but (*pace* Birch, 1991:37) one need not predicate disharmony or contradiction on that basis.

I will endeavour not to force homogeneity upon the text, as I hope that those who do not hold this presupposition will not dismiss arguments for unity out of hand.

3. Historical criticism is often underdetermined

I do not deny that historical work is indispensable for exegesis and interpretation. As Barton (1995:63) says, 'What the text means must include – even if it is not limited to – historical judgements about what the text meant'. However, it is possible to distinguish between historical work as a tool to *elucidate the world of the text* and that which uses the text as a *source* in the reconstruction of history. Fowl (1995:401) points out that historical study in service of exegesis is broader than historical criticism, and conversely that historical criticism often stops at history-behind-the-text and fails to address the text itself:

'Historical criticism, however, investigates only a very narrow range of historical issues... Those historical critics particularly engaged in reconstructive tasks tend to be uninterested in the biblical text once it reaches its final form.'

Furthermore, I am sceptical of the reliability and value of much of the work that carries on under the banner of historical criticism, especially the 'reconstruction' of sources and histories where the evidence is too scant or ambiguous to support the level of detail that the historian feels obliged to give. Where physical and textual evidence is plentiful, historical reconstruction commands greater reliability. Historical criticism, however, relies to a large degree on the few details given in the biblical text, and even then, they rely not on the history as the text presents it, but deconstruct the text in order to assign parts of it to an historical timeline constructed by other means (delineation of sources, comparative religions, etc.). The historical reconstruction takes precedence over the text.

This reconstruction – opposed as it usually is to the chronology of its primary source documents – is dependent upon the beliefs of the historian(s) responsible for the timeline to which the text is conformed. Although historical criticism was originally devised as a discipline of free enquiry,

uncoerced by faith assumptions or church or state (cf. Thiselton, 1995:11ff), it is now being more readily acknowledged that one does not achieve *objectivity* by removing faith assumptions, only a different sort of bias. The reconstruction of a history that includes the intervention of YHWH differs markedly from a history that is practically atheistic and must assume, for example, that the miraculous and revelatory are religious fictions. Seeing as I assume the former to be true, the reconstructions of history made on the assumption of the latter are of little use.

In this thesis, therefore, I retain an interest in history as a servant of the text, but I do not regard historical reconstructions to be authoritative. With regard to sources and dates of texts, I will labour under the following suppositions:

- Books developed and underwent editing over an unknown period of time.³
- It is clear that editing of the Hebrew Bible took place, but it should not be assumed that this process was destructive; it may well have been done with integrity and in continuity with the source material.⁴ I will labour under the assumption that it possible to make tentative assertions about Moses and his time, for example, even from Deuteronomy.

Moving on to the subject at hand, allow me to clarify terms by examining the vocabulary of prosperity and to introduce the structure of my research.

1.5 THE VOCABULARY OF PROSPERITY

Although the church prosperity movement and secular materialism have both made wealth the most common association with prosperity, it is a broad term with a wide range of meanings. Moreover, the Hebrew words underlying the translation ‘prosperity’ in English are many, with ranges of meaning that extend beyond what we mean by ‘prosperity’ in English. We will thus be interrogating Hebrew terms for their connection to the common prosperity themes of wealth, satisfaction, peace, and success (cf. Smith, A, 2009:649). We will therefore now attempt to list related terms and circumscribe the range of meaning of the biblical concept of prosperity.

³ I do not think that it is possible to know with certainty how to divide and date portions of text. Judgements on stylistic grounds tend to be ‘in the eye of the beholder’ and have insufficient empirical value. A text that appears late to one reader may be an early insight ‘before its time’ to another. Similarly a text written late may be indistinguishable from an early text revised and updated by a later editor. As such these sorts of judgements should be afforded correspondingly minimal power to intrude upon interpretation.

⁴ It is possible, for example, to write a history of early Russia for a post-Cold-War reader that acknowledges modern interests without doing violence to ancient data.

1.5.1 בֵּרַךְ

בֵּרַךְ and its derivatives have to do with blessing. While all of the other words under examination in this chapter can be considered sub-categories of prosperity, the opposite is the case of the concept of blessing: prosperity belongs as a sub-category of blessing. Allow me therefore to delay the word study in order to say a word about how these concepts will be used in this thesis.

A word about blessing and prosperity

The decision to study prosperity in the Old Testament has been motivated to a large degree by the pervasiveness of the so-called Prosperity Gospel in churches throughout Africa. Thus, it is important to me that attention is given specifically to *prosperity* language in scripture. However, prosperity as a concept falls within the gamut of the broader concept of blessing; almost everything that we consider to be part of prosperity also fits within what we call ‘blessings’.⁵ They are not coextensive though; not everything that is a blessing falls within the definition of prosperity.

Nevertheless, even though the terms are not precisely synonymous there is significant overlap; thus when referring to that area of overlap, I will use the two terms somewhat interchangeably in this thesis. What is said about blessing is integral to the understanding of prosperity, and what is said about prosperity will have a strong influence on the wider concept of blessing, thus both concepts will be relevant to the exegesis and discussion.

.....

Looking now at the biblical usage of blessing concepts, there has been significant debate about the meaning and operation of blessing in the Old Testament, with many scholars of the last century seeing ‘behind the scenes’ of scripture some parallels with magical, animistic beliefs about the transfer of power between individuals (cf. Westermann, 1978:15ff). Mitchell (1987:2) convincingly opposed this view, and offered in its place the idea that blessing is an action between two parties that expresses a relationship of favour, but no inherent power to bring about the good (unless God graciously provides it). The primary blessing relationship is between God (or the gods) and man, as only divine power can bring about the various good things that constitute blessings (1987:15). Blessing between individuals amounts to wishes or prayers for God’s favour to be at work within this favoured human relationship, but the term can also refer to concrete acts of benefaction between people (1987:79).

⁵ There is an important respect in which prosperity can fall outside of the gamut of blessing, as we shall see below.

There are also *niphal* and *hitpael* versions of this root that refer either to requesting to be blessed or blessing oneself. Brown (1996:760) points out that both forms are capable of being rendered passively or reflexively. Thus ‘grammatical arguments are not decisive’ when such forms are encountered, but must be settled contextually. Scripture also includes human blessings of God, but Mitchell argues that this use of the word is derived from the custom of using בָּרַךְ in expressions of goodwill and thanksgiving between people. ‘Blessing God’ is synonymous with praise (1987:134).

So, ‘to bless’ refers to an expression of relational favour between parties, as well as the bestowal of good things where it is in the subject’s power to bring it about. A ‘blessing’ refers to the good given by God, or to the wish or petition for good between people. This conclusion will prove important, because if his analysis of each occurrence of blessing in the Bible has determined that blessing is given as expression of relational favour, it supports the contention that prosperity too is only offered within the sphere of properly ordered relationship.

Mitchell (1987:185) has tabulated the occurrences of בָּרַךְ in the Old Testament as follows:

TABLE 1.1: Occurrences of בָּרַךְ “Bless” in the Bible

	Qal	Niph.	Piel	Pual	Hith.	בָּרַךְ	TOTAL
Gen.	8	3	59	-	2	16	88
Exo.	1	-	5	-	-	1	7
Lev.	-	-	2	-	-	1	3
Num.	2	-	14	1	-	-	17
Deu.	9	-	28	1	1	12	51
Jos.	-	-	8	-	-	2	10
Jud.	1	-	3	2	-	1	7
1Sa.	7	-	4	-	-	2	13
2Sa.	3	-	10	1	-	1	15
1Ki.	6	-	6	-	-	-	12
2Ki.	-	-	3	-	-	2	5
Isa.	2	-	4	-	2	4	12
Jer.	2	-	1	-	1	-	4
Eze.	1	-	-	-	-	3	4
The 12	1	-	1	-	-	4	6
Psa.	17	-	52	4	1	9	83
Pro.	1	-	3	2	-	8	14
Job	-	-	7	1	-	1	9
Megilloth	4	-	1	-	-	-	5
Dan.	1	-	2	1	-	-	4
Ezra	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Neh.	-	-	4	-	-	2	6
1Ch.	2	-	13	1	-	-	16
2Ch.	3	-	5	-	-	2	10
Torah	20	3	108	2	3	30	166
Prophets	23	-	40	3	3	19	88
Writings	29	-	87	9	1	22	148
TOTAL	72	3	235	14	7	71	402

The context of each usage needs to be examined in order to evaluate its relevance to the semantic field of prosperity. Thus the above figures need to be assigned a margin of error when used for any other purposes. Nevertheless, this gives a good indication of the distribution of blessing language.

The difference between 'blessing' and 'prosperity'

As was mentioned in the introduction, the meaning and function of בִּרְךְ is wider than the semantic field of prosperity, but most of what we associate with prosperity can be contained within the range of בִּרְךְ. What then are the key points of difference and similarity?

We've seen that Mitchell has argued that 'blessing' is essentially a relational concept; it refers to the state of fellowship and favour of God towards the one who is blessed. This is the chief point of difference between blessing and prosperity. Prosperity – at least as we speak of it today – tends to be material or at least related to pleasant circumstances and states of being. It is not typically relational. A second significant difference is that prosperity is not limited to the 'blessed'. It can be experienced by those outside of God's relational favour. Thus, seeing as blessing is relational in nature, it is possible for prosperity to be *unrelated* to it, even though we would typically classify wealth or ease as 'blessings'.

However, in spite of these differences, it is legitimate to bring the two concepts into contact because material prosperity is among the blessings that YHWH offers, and because He is a liberal and generous God who has the power to bring about prosperity as an expression of His favour (i.e. as part of blessing). Thus when God promises prosperity to His favoured people it is within the gamut of blessing, and in that context, we are able to talk about the two concepts virtually interchangeably.

1.5.2 טב

The derivatives of טב are related to 'good' as a central concept, but it is a flexible word. It is also common. According to Höver-Johag, it is used 741 times in the Old Testament (1986:303). He provides a more detailed account of its base meaning too:

[טב] refers in general to the qualities that make an object desirable... In all the Semitic languages, טב is used in the context of everyday life to designate the practical utility of an object, an action, or a situation, with reference to its being 'useful' or 'advantageous.' (1986:298f)

The most common usage of טוב in the OT is utilitarian. From the perspective of the suitability of an object or person, the focus is on the functional aspect, as being in proper order or suited for the job.

We are thus dealing with ‘goodness for something,’ with a very concrete and tangible meaning in the background.⁶ (1986:304)

Many of the uses of טב have no direct connection to prosperity. It can operate as a simple adjective, making a judgment about quality, usefulness, moral character, etc. When applied to persons, it emphasises special abilities or positive qualities, such as strength, beauty, or skill (Höver-Johag, 1986:305f). Gordon (1996:354) claims its ethical sense as another important meaning that it can convey. He cites Micah 6:8 as a classic example; in that text, ‘what is good’ is put in parallel with justice, mercy, and humility.

Of greater pertinence to prosperity, טוֹב is used in some constructions to indicate relationships of advantage. It refers to benefit that someone gains through another person, thing, or action (1986:303). This is especially pertinent when God is the subject in that construction, seeing as His will to ‘do good’ to someone is backed by the power to bring good about.⁷

Importantly, טב words also refer to general well-being, to ‘good’ of unspecified details. Often a comprehensive *state* of ‘good’ is implied, as for example when it is connected to promises of future salvation and restoration:

In Jeremiah, טוֹב frequently appears in the context of [salvation history], referring to the future well-being of both nation and individual (Jer. 8:15; 14:11, 19; 17:6; etc.). It takes on special importance as the substance of the new covenant. (1986:315)

טב words seem frequently to emphasise material goods or the enjoyment of good *things*:

Human beings experience God’s goodness in the form of good things... The reference is to material goods that make for a happy life... without regard to moral qualities. (1986:315)

טב words have a wide variety of connections to prosperity. Table 1.2 below is a survey of the uses of טב derivatives that have connection to prosperity-related concepts.⁸

⁶ Genesis 1 is the ‘parade example’ in which something is examined, and the conclusion is that it is ‘good’. Craftsmen would apparently greet the completion of their work with, ‘See, it is good.’

⁷ ‘The notion of Yahweh [the Good One] as the source of human well-being and prosperity is developed most extensively in the thanksgiving and historical Psalms, as well as Jeremiah.’ (Höver-Johag, 1986:314)

⁸ All tables in this section (besides Mitchell’s tabulation of בָּרַךְ above) reflect my own classification and judgment about the meaning of word uses in these texts. All counts should be regarded as illustrative rather than authoritative.

TABLE 1.2: Distribution and classification of טוב language

	Unspecified good	Material prosperity	Success	'Be well (with you)'	Good land	'Good hand of God'	Good of the land	Good things / best	Goodness of God	Material prosperity	To do well / good	To go well	To make prosperous	
	טוב						טוב				יָטֵב			TOTAL
Gen.	1						2	2			3	2		10
Exo.	1				1				1		1			4
Lev.														0
Num.	2				2						2			6
Deu.	3	4		3	10			1			3	7	1	32
Jos.	1				3						1			4
Jud.					1								2	3
1Sa.	3										1		1	5
2Sa.														0
1Ki.	1	1			1								1	4
2Ki.								1				1		2
Isa.							1		1					2
Jer.	16	1		2			1		2		3	4		29
Eze.	1													1
The 12	2	1							2		1			6
Psa.	14			1			1		4	1	2			23
Pro.	7	1								1				9
Job	5	4								2	1			12
Song														0
Ruth												1	1	2
Ecc.		7	1											8
Lam.	3													3
Est.	1													1
Dan.														0
Ezra		1				3				1				5
Neh.						2			2					8
1Ch.	3				1			1						1
2Ch.		1												1
Torah	7	4	0	3	13	0	2	3	1	0	9	9	1	52
Prophets	24	3	0	2	5	0	2	1	5	0	6	5	4	57
Writings	33	14	1	1	1	5	1	1	6	5	3	1	1	73
TOTAL	64	21	1	6	19	5	5	5	12	5	18	15	6	182

[Please see the appendix at the end of the chapter for verse references sorted by category.]

By my count, there are over 182 relevant uses, with high frequency of usage in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and the Psalms. It is noteworthy that 64 uses of טוב are left non-specific regarding their content, or perhaps indicate a comprehensive state of good. The verb forms frequently also have this sense. Where the content is more obvious, material goods (often in abundance) is a dominant referent. By contrast, טוב words rarely have to do with success.

טוֹב appears in some important phrases. Firstly, the ‘good land’ appears as a category in this list because, although these occurrences might be considered simple adjectival uses and discarded with countless others, they always appear in connection with descriptions of the abundance and rich resources of the Promised Land. ‘Good land’ might easily be translated ‘prosperous land’.

טוֹב also appears in the phrase favoured by the writer(s) of Ezra-Nehemiah: ‘the good hand of God’ (was upon me). It refers to the receipt of the Lord’s favour for bringing about a good result (in this case ‘success’ seems often to be meant), or as it is rendered on two occasions, ‘*The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him...*’ (Ezra 8:22; cf. Neh. 2:18).

טוֹב appears regularly in connection with God’s goodness, especially in the Psalms. Often God’s goodness refers to His moral characteristics, as evidenced by Exodus 33:19 and 34:6-7 (Gordon, 1996:355). However, elsewhere His ‘goodness’ is a declaration not primarily of morality, but rather of liberality and grace. Nehemiah 9 illustrates how God’s goodness can be synonymous with the bounty that He graciously supplies:

And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. (9:25)

Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. (9:35; cf. Jeremiah 31:12, 14 and Zechariah 9:17)

So, it is clear that ‘good’ commonly refers to the receipt of a good thing, or a prosperous or happy state of being. In many of its uses, therefore, it closely resembles the meaning of the next important word in the semantic field, שְׁלוֹם.

1.5.3 שְׁלוֹם

Another ubiquitous biblical root related to ‘prosperity’ is שְׁלוֹם, especially the noun שְׁלוֹם. DL Smith’s (2009:423) brief survey of the meaning of שְׁלוֹם identifies the root meaning as ‘well-being’ or ‘prosperity’ – a state of being. Against the popular rendering of it as ‘peace’, Smith distances it from cessation of conflict, and while שְׁלוֹם is not entirely divorced from the idea, he claims that the term שְׁקט (rest) is more appropriate for this purpose.

Other scholars are reluctant to assign a single basic meaning for שְׁלוֹם. Stendebach (2006:16f) denies that its meaning can be adequately captured by a single idea, though many of the concepts are united by the idea of ‘wholeness’ or ‘completeness’.

The *piel* verb of שָׁלוֹם has been proposed as underlying the noun שָׁלוֹם. The verb can be translated ‘give back, pay, settle, replace, requite, etc.’, which has led to general connections of שָׁלוֹם with peace and well-being or satisfaction and sufficiency. Following this reasoning, Gerleman (quoted in Stendebach, 2006:18) understood שָׁלוֹם as provision of more than just what is adequate, but rather ‘denoting plenitude, a “sufficiency” measured by full or copious measure’. Others have found this derivation from the *piel* to rest on too narrow a foundation.

Stendebach (2006:18) notes that von Rad understood שָׁלוֹם as a term of mostly material reference, preferring to render it as ‘welfare’, as in bodily health, prosperity, and contentment. He agreed that it could refer to a sense of peace when associated with a group. Stendebach adds that in a great number of passages שָׁלוֹם seems not to refer to a state of being, but rather the condition of a relationship (e.g. 1Kings 5:12). In these cases, שָׁלוֹם is a social idea, referring to a whole, unimpaired, harmonious relationship; communion and equilibrium.

There are a number of uses of שָׁלוֹם, including some of the relational ones just mentioned, that illustrate how difficult it is to find a simple unifying idea behind the word. Stendebach (2006:27-31) lists the following examples:

- Joseph’s brothers could no longer speak to him לְשָׁלוֹם.
- Joseph was told to check on the שָׁלוֹם of his brothers and the שָׁלוֹם of the flock.
- Joseph inquires of his brothers’ שָׁלוֹם, and then of his father. The brothers reply of Jacob, ‘Your servant has שָׁלוֹם... he is still alive’.
- לְשָׁלוֹם is Israel’s call to enemy cities either to submit to Israel’s rule or to fight. Stendebach sees this as a ‘*pax israelitica*’: Israel’s well-being or else.
- Dt. 23:6 forbids Israel to promote שָׁלוֹם וְטִבָּתָם (the peace and good) of the Ammonites and Moabites.
- In Dt. 29:19, שָׁלוֹם is a ‘counter-blessing’ to ward off a curse.
- In 2Sam. 11:7 David asks after the שָׁלוֹם of his army and commander.

In some instances, the meaning has to do with favour, and friendly intentions. In others, it is clearly to do with well-being. The example from 2Samuel illustrates that it does not naturally refer to peacetime, as after the battle, David enquires about the שָׁלוֹם of his people, rather than asking whether שָׁלוֹם has been achieved. Israel’s call for surrender is perhaps the most puzzling, but it may be best to view it as a call for peaceful relations (albeit on Israel’s terms), or a reminder that the alternative to surrender is an *end* to well-being.

Broad definition of שלום

Stendebach concludes that ‘sufficiency’ or ‘wholeness’ are useful as conceptual markers, but he denies that either one does duty in all cases or that there is any word that fully captures the breadth of שלום. By way of broad definition, he helpfully offers the following:

שלום is a comprehensive expression denoting all that the people of ancient Near East wish for as the substance of blessing. ‘It is a state of being unimpaired and unthreatened, of ease and security, of felicity and wholeness in the broadest sense’ (Stendebach quoting Hempel, 2006:19).

שלום in a material sense clearly overlaps with states of being that we would describe as prosperous. As Nel (1997b:131) observes, ‘In a material or secular sense שלום designates well-being, prosperity, or bodily health... It also expresses the state of mind or internal condition of being at ease, satisfied or fulfilled’.

שלום as a relational idea is more akin to ‘favour’ or even to ‘peace’. Westermann observes that ‘peace’ in contrast to war is a secondary semantic development that arose on account of the interference with social well-being that war brings (Stendebach, 2006:19). Strife (and especially war) is an observable disruption to prosperity and ease. Thus even prosperity and peace share a link.

Peace and prosperity meet in the covenant

This connection between peace and prosperity is evident in covenantal language between God and man. שלום is used as a descriptor of the Promised Land in the lead-up to the conquest; in Leviticus 26:6 it is a promised blessing: ‘I will grant שלום in the land.’ In context, שלום ‘describes an all-embracing state of well-being,’ which includes fertility and safety (Stendebach, 2006:28).

The connection of relational שלום and material שלום is seen in Ezekiel’s use of the בְּרִית שלום. In 34:5 God’s ‘covenant of peace’ will mean prosperity and peace for His people. In 37:26 it is clear that the ‘covenant of peace’ means a restoration of the original vision of righteousness and blessing for the heirs of the Promised Land. ‘The בְּרִית שלום is, therefore, the promissory covenant of God given to his restored people as an eternal blessing and salvation.’ (Nel, 1997b:132)

Stendebach sees the link between covenant relationship and general prosperity in Jeremiah 33:9.

[It] says that all the nations will fear and tremble because of all the good (טוֹבָה) and all the שלום that YHWH will provide. Here שלום probably means general well-being. The parallelism with טוֹבָה recalls the terminology of Akkadian treaties; the essence of שלום includes the positive relationship of YHWH to Jerusalem. (2006:37)

In favour of the covenant connection, he quotes Zimmerli, saying:

The word שָׁלוֹם... indicates in the first instance the reality of which a covenant in any case consists. Covenant means the establishment of a relationship of well-being between the partners of the covenant... When YHWH is the covenant partner, the well-being will extend over the whole sphere of life of the nation and will bring about peace there. (2006:38)

YHWH's covenantal favour is relational 'peace', and yet because of who He is, that relational שָׁלוֹם is bound up with 'well-being in a comprehensive sense' (2006:28). Therefore we can conclude that שָׁלוֹם has strong links to prosperity both when applied to material things and when describing the divine-human relationship, because even as a relational category it has reference to completeness and total well-being.

I have classified and tabulated the uses of שָׁלוֹם that are relevant to prosperity as follows:

TABLE 1.3: Distribution and classification of שָׁלוֹם

	Ease, rest, calm	Safety	Political peace	Wholeness, good	Well-being	God's favour	Material prosperity	'Covenant of peace'	
	שָׁלוֹם								TOTAL
Gen. Exo. Lev. Num. Deu.	1	1		1	4 1	1 1		1	6 3 0 2 4
Jos. Jud. 1Sa. 2Sa. 1Ki. 2Ki. Isa. Jer. Eze. The 12		1 1 2 3 3	1 1 1 2		1 1 6 5	3			2 6 4 9 8 12 25 21 5 11
Psa. Pro. Job Song Ruth Ecc. Lam. Est. Dan. Ezra Neh. 1Ch.	6	2 1	3 1 1	7 2 2 1 2 1	1	1	3 1 1		23 3 4 1 0 1 1 3 1 1 0 1

2Ch.	1	4		1					6
Torah	1	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	15
Prophets	18	13	13	29	19	5	3	3	103
Writings	8	7	5	16	2	2	5	0	45
TOTAL	27	22	20	46	26	9	9	4	163

In minor disagreement with some of the scholars discussed above, my survey of the usage of שָׁלוֹם in the Old Testament found a substantial percentage of them could be construed as being related to cessation of conflict, with about 20 instances of שָׁלוֹם in contrast to war, and more that refer at least to returning home safely from battle or other dangers. I agree, however, that the majority of uses show a bias towards a state of total well-being.

It is noteworthy that while the Pentateuch is thick with blessing language, it contains only 15 verses that include שָׁלוֹם, considerably less than Isaiah and Jeremiah each have *on their own*.⁹ This probably reflects the hope in the fulfilment of *covenant blessing* in the Pentateuch, in contrast to conditions of political, social, and spiritual upheaval that plagued the age of these prophets. This serves also to confirm that while שָׁלוֹם certainly does have wholeness and total well-being close to its heart, this remains closely connected to absence of conflict on earth and from heaven.

In comparison with טוֹב, שָׁלוֹם shows a much-reduced interest in overtly material blessings, with a greater emphasis upon absence of threat and enjoyment of ease and security. Both share a comparable interest in the wholeness and full life of individual or community, and in fact, שָׁלוֹם and טוֹב occasionally appear together as a pair (often rendered 'peace and prosperity', e.g. Deuteronomy 23:6), perhaps intending to encompass every kind of good.

שָׁלוֹם also appears in characteristic phrases, such as, 'you shall go to your fathers in peace' (Genesis 15:15; cf. 'Sheol' in 1 Kings 2:6; 'grave' in 2 Kings 22:20, 2 Chronicles 34:28), which seems to refer to a state of ease and calm; or perhaps merely in contrast to a death in terror and tragedy. There are also four references to a 'covenant of שָׁלוֹם', which in the prophets is synonymous with Israel's hope in their restoration and a promised state of blessing.

1.5.4 Overview of rarer terms

There are many other words that have importance to the semantic field of prosperity, although they are rarer words than שָׁלוֹם, טוֹב, and בָּרֵךְ.

⁹ This total counts the phrase, 'peace, peace when there is no peace' as *one* occurrence, not three.

Most significant of the rarer words is **צִלַּח** and its derivatives, which relate to ‘prospering’, that is, prosperity as success. **שָׂכַל** words are also important, and are responsible for the connection of insight, skill and wisdom to prosperity. These and other minor words have their prosperity-related uses distributed across scripture as follows:

TABLE 1.4: Distribution of rarer terms

	שָׂכַל	שָׂכַל	שִׁלָּה	כֶּשֶׁר	נָשַׁג	צִלַּח	שִׁלָּה	שָׂמָה	TOTAL
Gen.						7			7
Exo.					4				0
Lev.									4
Num.						1			1
Deu.	1				1	1			3
Jos.	2					1			3
Jud.						4*			4
1Sa.	4					4*			8
2Sa.								1	1
1Ki.	1					2			3
2Ki.	1								1
Isa.					2	4			6
Jer.	2		3			5			10
Eze.			2						2
The 12			1						1
Psa.			4			4			8
Pro.	1	4	1			1			7
Job		1	5						6
Song									0
Ruth									0
Ecc.				2					2
Lam.			1						1
Est.									0
Dan.		1	3			5^	2		11
Ezra		1					2		3
Neh.						2			2
1Ch.			1			3			4
2Ch.						10			10
Torah	1	0	0	0	5	9	0	0	15
Prophets	10	0	6	0	2	20	0	1	39
Writings	1	7	15	2	0	25	4	0	54
TOTAL	12	7	21	2	7	54	4	1	108

*But for one example in Judges, these refer to the Spirit of the Lord ‘rushing upon’ someone, empowering their success.

^All the instances in Daniel have to do with succeeding in wickedness.

צִלַּח

The root **צִלַּח** primarily relates to success, whether in general or of a particular goal (cf. Hausmann, 2003:383). Luc (1997b:804) agrees that it refers usually to ‘accomplishing effectively what is intended,’ and he adds that the word can be applied to non-personal subjects too, such as trees thriving, weapons prospering, or a waistcloth being useful. He also point out that the theological

emphasis is on God alone as the one who brings success. This point is made especially strongly in some constructions using **נִלָּח** that are translated as God's Spirit 'coming upon' individuals in order to achieve a set purpose.

Biblical examples of this sort of prosperity include God prospering Joseph's work in Genesis 39:3, 23, and the Chronicler's report of Solomon's success (1Ch. 29:23; 2Ch. 7:11). (Hausmann, 2003:384)

Occurrences are evenly spread in the Old Testament, though with heavier representation in narrative genres than in the rest.

שָׁכַל

According to Koenen (2004:115), the **שָׁכַל** root relates primarily to insight. In the *hiphil*, the verb often means 'to have insight', as it does frequently in Chronicles. The *hiphil* participle 'describes how a reasonable or successful person acts or fares'. However, Deuteronomy usually uses the *hiphil* verb form to mean 'have success'. Koenen (2004:117) accounts for the variation as follows:

Being reasonable includes corresponding behaviour. A reasonable person practices justice and righteousness (Ps. 36:4; 101:2; Jer 23:5), and from such behaviour success follows according to the OT understanding of the act-consequence nexus. Hence **שָׁכַל** can also refer to success in the sense of a fulfilled life, though also more concretely in the sense of individual successes, e.g., a military victory.

When **חִישָׁכַל** means 'be successful', Koenen (2004:122f) claims that it implies the comprehensively blessed life enjoyed by people of insight in wisdom instruction. Likewise, YHWH's covenantal presence with His people is the basis for the similarly comprehensive success enjoyed by those who keep the covenant, such as in Deuteronomy 29:8.

שָׁלַח

The root **שָׁלַח** and its derivatives relate to rest or ease. Nel (1997a:117) says that the verb usually designates an easy-going and prosperous way of living. Most often, however, 'being at ease' is directed in a critical tone towards the complacency of the wicked, as in Job 12:6; Jer. 12:1; and Lam. 1:5. The adjective **שָׁלִי** is usually rendered 'carefree, at ease, undisturbed, calm', and there are three nominal forms. **שָׁלִי** is translated by Nel (1997a:118) as 'prosperity, ease', and he claims that it appears only in Psalm 30:6.¹⁰ **שָׁלִי** refers to 'ease, careless security', a life without strife and with

¹⁰ Grunwaldt claims that it appears in biblical Aramaic meaning 'laxity, carelessness, or (perhaps) transgression' (2006:10)

security. Negatively it can mean ‘unpreparedness’ or ‘unconcern’, or even ‘idleness’ or ‘carelessness’. **שָׁלֵי** refers to ‘quietness, privacy’, appearing only in 2Sam. 3:27.

In terms of prosperity, **שָׁלֵה** words can often refer to a life of ease and freedom from hardship. In Psalm 122, Grunwaldt (2006:12) points out that there is interplay of similar sounding **שָׁלֵה** and **שָׁלֵם** derivatives, indicating some congruity between ease and **שָׁלֵם**. The book of Job further supports the connection of **שָׁלֵה** to a prosperous life in 3:26, in which the previously wealthy Job laments the lack of his former **שָׁלֵה** (cf. 16:12). On other occasions, however, wisdom literature uses **שָׁלֵה** to mean merely an ‘inner quiet’,¹¹ or ‘complacency’, as in Prov. 1:32 (Grunwaldt, 2006:11f).

Occurrences that have reference to prosperity do not appear at all in the Pentateuch (perhaps following the de-emphasis upon **שָׁלֵם** in that material, as both these terms might be classified as peace language). It appears frequently in the Pentateuch in connection with repayment or restitution. As a peace word, its derivatives have strong representation in the writings. This may indicate that this use of the word was favoured later in Israel’s history.

כָּשַׁר

Another root belonging to the sphere of ‘success’ is **כָּשַׁר**. It appears once in Esther 8:5 – in which it means ‘be right, appropriate’ – but all other uses are found in Ecclesiastes. Luc (1997a:738) claims that the emphasis of **כָּשַׁר** is on the success of a *matter*, rather than success as an attribute of a person. The noun **כְּשָׁרוֹן** refers to something gained or achieved, but all three occurrences belong to negative comments about success.

Luc (1997a:739) also claims that the **כָּשַׁר** root refers to success through human effort, rather than the focus on divine empowering that is evident in synonyms for success such as **שָׁלֵה**. However, given that the usage of this root is confined to Ecclesiastes, this conclusion may have more to do with the theology of the book than an inherent characteristic of the root.

צָמַח

The root **צָמַח** can be translated as ‘sprout, spring up, grow, prosper, make grow’. By Abegg’s (1997:815) count it occurs 33 times, 14 of which refer to the literal sprouting of a plant.¹² When the

¹¹ E.g. Prov 17:1; Job 20:20

¹² A similar ratio of ‘12 total uses : 7 literal shoots’ applies to nominal derivatives (Abegg, 1997:816).

verb refers to blessing, God is the subject (Gen 2:9; Job 38:27; Ps 104:14; 147:8), and the earth is the subject in the context of curse (Gen 3:18; Deut 29:23). By my reckoning, none of these passages have direct enough reference to prosperity; the only one that does is as follows:

For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire? (2 Samuel 23:5, ESV)

נִשָּׂא

נִשָּׂא is a root that can occasionally refer to the attainment of riches. According to Wakely (1997:163f) the verb is a hunting term, appearing 50 times in total, and usually translated as ‘overtake, catch up, attain, reach; afford; become rich/prosperous’. When the verb is combined with the noun נֶדֶר, it means ‘afford’ or ‘become rich/prosperous’, depending on the context. Many of these uses relate to special legal concessions that were made to the poor who could not afford to fulfil the ordinary sacrificial duties (Wakely, 1997:167). Accordingly, reference to prosperity is relatively rare.

Leviticus uses the word to refer to someone who has attained a certain standard of wealth, whether to redeem himself from slavery, or to afford the purchase of slaves. Deuteronomy 28 employs the word 3 times, using a play on the meanings ‘overtake’ and ‘prosper’. Two other uses, both in Isaiah, loosely relate to prosperity, in that they refer to reaching a שְׁלוֹמִים-like state.

1.5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the key biblical terms underlying the concepts germane to prosperity are טוֹב, בָּרֵךְ, שְׁלוֹמִים, and צִלְחָה. שָׁלוֹם and שִׁלְחָה are among the more important of the remaining roots. Prosperity, therefore, includes such components as material blessings, the state of general well-being, the relational favour of God, success in various endeavours, fertility, completeness, and ease.

1.6 STRUCTURE

In order to help establish which passages are of significance to the subject, I have tabulated the occurrences of significant terminology so as to note distribution patterns, both per book and per chapter. The results are as follows:

1.6.1 Book-by-book distribution

TABLE 1.5: Book-by-book distribution

	ברך	טוב	שָׁלוֹם	צִלָּה	Other	TOTAL	Chapters	Index
Gen	88	10	6	7		111	50	2.2
Exod	7	4	3			14	40	0.4
Lev	3				4	7	27	0.3
Num	17	6	2	1		26	36	0.7
Deut	51	32	4	1	2	90	34	2.6
Josh	10	4	2	1	2	19	24	0.8
Judg	7	3	6	4		20	21	1
1 Sam	13	5	4	4	4	30	31	1
2 Sam	15		9		1	25	24	1
1 Kgs	12	4	8	2	1	27	22	1.2
2 Kgs	5	2	12		1	20	25	0.8
Isa	12	2	25	4	2	45	66	0.7
Jer	4	29	21	5	5	64	52	1.2
Ezek	4	1	5		2	12	48	0.3
The 12	6	6	11		1	24	67	0.4
Pss	83	23	23	4	4	137	150	0.9
Prov	14	9	3	1	6	33	31	1.1
Job	9	12	4		6	31	42	0.7
Song			1			1	8	0.1
Ruth	5	2				7	4	1.8
Eccl		8	1		2	11	12	0.9
Lam		3	1		1	5	5	1
Esth		1	3			4	10	0.4
Dan	4		1	7	4	16	12	1.3
Ezra	1	5	1	2	1	10	10	1
Neh	6	8		2		16	13	1.2
1 Chron	16	1	1	3	1	22	29	0.8
2 Chron	10	1	6	10		27	36	0.8
Torah	166	52	15	9	8	248	187	1.3
Prophets	88	57	103	20	19	287	380	0.8
Writings	148	73	45	29	25	320	362	0.9
TOTAL	402	182	163	58	52	855	929	0.9

I have two means of evaluating these results. Firstly, the gross number of occurrences in a book is an important clue to the importance of the theme. Secondly, as a means of indicating relative *frequency* of usage, the right hand columns include the total number of chapters in each book ('Chapters') and the number of occurrences per chapter ('Index'). Both these evaluative methods are necessary, because longer books may not sustain the theme consistently enough to have a high index, and yet they contain weighty and important sections (e.g. Psalms, which has the most uses of blessing language, but only average index), and short books may use the words a few times with very little import, and yet have a high index (e.g. Ruth, which has an index of twice the average, yet only uses 7 prosperity-related words in total).

Noteworthy observations from the tabulation of these results includes the following:

- Genesis and Deuteronomy are both radically over-represented, surpassing two occurrences of prosperity-related terminology per chapter.
- The rest of the Pentateuch is low on this terminology, especially Leviticus. This is a surprise seeing that blessing is often associated with cultic functions.
- Jeremiah is the highest represented of the prophets, but is especially noteworthy for the near-absence of בֵּרַךְ language but strong usage of תוֹב and שְׁלוֹם.
- Ezekiel, of priestly background, contains surprisingly little.
- As mentioned previously, the Torah has a large proportional majority of references to בֵּרַךְ and a slight majority of references to תוֹב; however, it has hardly any interest in שְׁלוֹם. The prophets have a disproportionate preference for שְׁלוֹם. This probably indicates that שְׁלוֹם is a concept better suited to themes of conflict (many of the references are *negative*; proclamations of peace when there is none – Jeremiah’s 21 uses of שְׁלוֹם include only about 4 that are positive) and to future hope. The Pentateuch speaks of gifts predicated from a favourable relationship with God, the prophets from one of enmity.
- Psalms has the vast majority of occurrences among the writings, and while the frequency of בֵּרַךְ is expected (on account of its connection with praise language), there is significant use of תוֹב and שְׁלוֹם.

Chapter-by-chapter distribution

In order to assess the degree to which prosperity terminology appears in clusters, I have also tabulated occurrences per chapter. The full tabulation is available in 7.2 Appendix B. Some chapters stand out due to volume of occurrences, but are of less importance than is expected. Genesis 27, for example, contains 23 occurrences of blessing language, but it is the chapter about Jacob stealing Esau’s blessing, and as such it is dominated by prosaic use of בֵּרַךְ language, and it ends up being of limited value. By contrast, some chapters have fewer occurrences, but are crucial texts. I have selected four to be the subject of more detailed exegesis in the chapters that follow, aiming at selecting texts from different literature types, namely:

- **Genesis 12:** Abraham’s calling is the first act particular to Israel’s history, following the more cosmic-focused ‘prehistory’ that occupies the first 11 chapters. This chapter contains only six blessing words, but they are extremely important. The passage follows the curse passages of Genesis 3-11, and God’s call of Abram is made in terms of promises of blessing. This arguably forms the foundational passage for blessing and prosperity in the rest of the Bible.

- **Deuteronomy 6:** While Deuteronomy 6 is also relatively light on blessing language, the count is deceptive; in addition to the four uses of key vocabulary, the chapter contains significant *descriptions* of the prosperity of the land that fell outside of the count. Secondly, this passage demands attention because of its central role in Jewish faith. It is significant that the Decalogue in chapter 5 and the great statement about God in the *Shema* (chapter 6) is followed by rich promises of good gifts, most notably the inheritance of the Promised Land. Thirdly, the focus on blessing pervades the surrounding chapters. Finally, Deuteronomistic theology is thought to underlie the histories from Joshua to Kings, and thus its perspectives on prosperity are likely to be influential throughout the narratives that follow it.
- **Jeremiah 32:** Jeremiah belongs to the ‘writing prophets’ and the book is prominent among this group of writings. It is written during the time of exile, when all of the Deuteronomic curses were falling. As such, it has the potential to hold a divergent view of prosperity, or to show other influences. Chapter 32 is also significant because it responds to judgment and exile with promises of restoration and a new covenant (especially echoing the famous promise of New Covenant from chapter 31), and so these promises not only have roots in the entire covenantal history of Israel, but send ‘shoots’ forward into the new age, and into the Christian writings on blessing.
- **Psalms 128:** This is a short text, but rich with the language of blessing and prosperity. As a wisdom Psalm concerned with ‘fear the Lord’, it stands as a nexus between Israel’s worship and her wisdom. Thus it is a helpful means of addressing both poetry and wisdom genres. It has a high vocabulary count for its length, and an interesting diversity of vocabulary too.

Having determined the passages seemingly of most importance to the subject of prosperity with the key bodies of Israelite literature, the structure of the research will be as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Genesis 12
3. Deuteronomy 6
4. Jeremiah 32
5. Psalm 128
6. Discussion of findings and conclusion
7. Appendices
8. Bibliography

1.6.2 Establishing Intertextual Connections

Each exegetical chapter will not only include study of the main text, but also less detailed consideration of texts that are considered to be connected. This will make it possible to develop and to test hypotheses more widely than merely in four texts, however important they may be.

A text may be considered for such a comparative study on the basis of one or more of the following:

- Shared membership in a larger structural section within the same book
- Connection by means of direct allusion
- Shared narrative setting; i.e. narrative elements transparently draw a link between texts (such as Jeremiah's two oracles from the same imprisonment, or the wife-sister stories shared by the Patriarchs)
- Shared themes, especially if there is consistent overlap of theme and language, or shared concern with a specific unusual element (such as 'New Covenant' in Jeremiah)

It is not possible to be entirely scientific and objective about determining intertextual connections; it is left to the reader to judge whether the case is strong enough, or whether the evidence is sufficient to bear the weight of whatever conclusion is being drawn.

1.7 THE PROMISED LAND

The theme of the Promised Land plays an important role in this thesis, and we shall make reference to it repeatedly. Thus it is necessary to say a few words about the land, in order to sketch the basic theological framework upon which comments will be based. Only after we have completed the task of examining texts and secondary literature will we be able to be more comprehensive. The following represents a brief account of my own view of the Promised Land.

1. The Promised Land in the Old Testament is the geographical land of Canaan.

The first thing that needs to be said is mostly uncontroversial, but also necessary: the Promised Land is identified as being the land of Canaan. There is no reason given for its election, but YHWH claims it as the place in which He plans to rule over Abram's chosen descendants.

The land was given by YHWH as a gift, but it is always in the state of being given by YHWH. It is never the absolute possession of Israel. Brueggemann (1977:93ff) offers the example of Jezebel, who as a foreigner misunderstood the nature of the land as gift, declaring to Ahab, 'I will give you the

vineyard'. Naboth had understood that it was not in his power to give the land ('The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers'); Jezebel thinks that God's vineyard is at her disposal.

The Promised Land is God's specially prepared place in which His name dwells, and it is not in human power to commodify or control the land, or to transfer or recreate it elsewhere.

2. *The punishment of the Exile was like the barring of the gate of Eden: the loss of life with God.*

If the Promised Land was the environment in which God would dwell with His people, the exile meant not merely a dislocation from home territory, but complete dissolution of the ideal. Just as Adam was evicted from the place of plenty, the place where God walked, and from the Tree of Life, so also Israel had to leave the place in which God promised to bless, and they lost God's life-giving presence among them. Brueggemann (1977:137f) cites Ezekiel's harsh words concerning the Exile, declaring the land itself at an end, and adding to this devastation the *departure of YHWH* from the land and city. 'God Himself is exiled'.

The ideal of living under His divine Kingship while in His kingdom was suspended; God was not absent from the exiles, but He was not at rest with them either.

3. *The return to Canaan was not the restoration of the ideal.*

God promised restoration to His people, but the return to the Promised Land was only a very partial fulfilment of that promise. Nehemiah 9:32 – 10:29, for example, illustrates the perception that Exile could not be over while the Promised Land was ruled by Gentiles rather than God (9:37), as well as the observation that blessing had not returned in restoration of their fortunes (9:36f). Nevertheless, the people make a commitment to keep the covenant (10:29), in anticipation of the Lord's intervention to bless again.

The Old Testament ends with the return to Canaan complete, but with the Exile not yet entirely over and the restoration to the conditions promised by the prophets still far from fulfilled. This should caution us from being too presumptuous about the place of the land and the state of Exile in the New Testament.

4. *The New Testament church should not be assumed to be the 'Promised Land'.*

There is a tendency in some church traditions to find relevance in the Old Testament by spiritualising whatever they find there. By this means or by considering the 'Promised Land' to be translatable as 'God's people' or 'God's presence', some consider the New Testament church to be a spiritual 'Promised Land'. While there are indeed elements of church life that show the character of the

kingdom and may be considered a partial fulfilment of the promised restoration, we will not follow this assumption. The role of land and Exile needs examination.

There is more that must be added concerning the place of the land in the New Testament, but we will return to the theology of land in the final chapter. In this thesis, discussion of the Promised Land will be centred upon the designated territory of Canaan for Old Testament Israel, but suffice it to say that any conclusions that are to be brought to bear upon the church will need to be recontextualised with care.

2. GENESIS 12

The call of Abraham signals a transition from the universal ‘prehistorical’ material of the Prologue (which interacts heavily with the legends of Israel’s surrounding nations) to the origins of God’s elect people. In spite of this shift, the stories of the Patriarchs are not divorced from the Prologue, but seem to be cast *in answer* to the problem of curse raised in chapters 1-11. Thus, our treatment of the promises to Abraham will be attentive also to their place in the plot of Genesis and their paradigmatic role, especially with regards to blessing and prosperity.

2.1 TRANSLATION¹³

¹ And YHWH said to Abram, ‘Go by yourself from your land and your relatives and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make¹⁴ you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you must be a blessing,¹⁵ ³ and I will bless those who

¹³ Translations at the start of each chapter are my own.

¹⁴ The promises to Abram are given in cohortative and imperative form. In combination, these verbs often express consequence (‘so that’) or intention (‘I will’). Baden (2010:226) has pointed out that consequence/purpose is a *possible* effect of volitive verb chains, but they may also express succession, or simultaneity. He argues that it is likely that the cohortatives here express volition and sequence: God is outlining His plan and inviting Abram to take up a role in it. It is a proposal rather than a list of promises. He translates the clause as, ‘Let me make you a great nation and bless you etc.’

Baden’s translation and argument are worth consideration. My only objections are that his translation of the cohortative as ‘let me’ is open to confusion in English with ‘allow me’; and that the sense of a request for partnership that he gives the text seems too weak, nullifying the sense of command that begins the chapter and the sense that God is also sovereign over his own will – He *brings about* whatever He wishes. I would agree that there is mutuality in the relationship to which God calls Abram, but I would seek to excise any sense of plaintiveness or doubtfulness. As Wenham (1987:266) argues, the cohortatives here still intend to express the idea that the thing promised ‘is to be expected with certainty’. It is difficult in English to express volition, the request for cooperation, and certainly all in one breath, and so I have opted for the future indicative (in spite of Baden’s opposition) in order to express intention, favouring the sense that it is God’s determined will to bless over purposive or volitional elements.

¹⁵ Baden (2010:228f) notes that scholars commonly ascribe a purposive sense to the imperative verb in 2b (‘so that you will be a blessing’), but that this is an exegetical decision, not a syntactical one. The verse may well intend volitive force (‘Be a blessing!’). He proceeds to argue (2010:233) that while short sequences (such as volitional + imperative) can express purpose, the larger sequence of 12:1-3 would place the imperative in the middle of a longer chain. He demonstrates that it is possible to express a purpose clause in the middle of a chain, but it is the function of the *weyiqtol* or (related) jussive to do so; it can’t be purpose in 12:2b. I accept his contention that the imperatival force should be explicitly expressed.

bless you and he who dishonours¹⁶ you I will curse,¹⁷ and in you all the families of the earth will find blessing.¹⁸

⁴ And Abram went as YHWH had spoken¹⁹ to him and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot the son of his brother, and all

¹⁶ Genesis 12:3 uses different words for the curse that someone places on Abram and the curse that God visits upon them in retribution. Mitchell says,

There is no single root that is antonymous to בָּרַךְ in all its forms. Though אָרַךְ is the usual antonym to בָּרַךְ, קָלַל is the usual antonym to בָּרַךְ, and the finite forms of the verb בָּרַךְ can have... [various] other verbs as antonyms, depending on the meaning and context of בָּרַךְ (1987:42)

קָלַל... has the broadest range of meaning of all the curse words, and its meaning completely overlaps the meanings of the other words... the *Piel* of קָלַל is the usual antonym to the *Piel* of בָּרַךְ (1987:93).

The use of קָלַל for the action of the human offender indicates that any sort of curse is sufficient to warrant God's severe response. Hence there is a need to indicate this difference in the way one translates this passage. I have followed the ESV in translating קָלַל with 'dishonour', which does not have the breadth of קָלַל, but functions as the lower limit, implying actions of greater severity too.

¹⁷ The blessing-curse construction here is chiasmic, and thus the second verb is disjunctive, appearing after the object. This means that it is not formally part of the chain of cohortatives. Nevertheless, by virtue of the fact that it is in parallel with a cohortative, it is clearly intended to have the same volitive force (Baden, 2010:231). Thus theological points that depend upon its disjunction are tenuous at best.

¹⁸ According to Baden (2010:232f), the function of a *weqatal* in a volitive sequence 'is well established: it serves to express succession.' This also may contain a nuance of consequence / purpose, though the many examples that do not demonstrate such a nuance prove that it is not a necessary feature of the syntax. He thus argues that the verse should be understood to mean that the nations will bless themselves by Abram 'once the preceding actions have taken place.' I accept the argument concerning succession, though not the interpretation of וְנִבְרַכְוּ as 'will bless themselves'.

Wenham's translation says that in Abram all nations will 'find blessing', understanding the *Niphal* as middle voice, but it could also be passive, 'be blessed', or reflexive, 'bless themselves' (1987:266). He goes on to argue that Zechariah 8:13 holds similar language, and in that text the prophet starts by saying, 'As you have been a byword for cursing among the nations... so I will save you and you will be a blessing' (1987:276). Seeing as the curse in that text is a formulaic saying, it indicates that 'being a blessing' also involves some sort of blessing formula. If the same meaning is in view, then Genesis 12 would mean that the nations will invoke Abram's example as they make petition for their own blessing. This is much the same meaning as is implied by the reflexive use (cf. Skinner, 1930:244f). The passive sense, however, ('in / through Abram will all nations be blessed') suggests that the nations will receive blessing through being connected to Abram somehow. As we shall discuss later, it is clear that the author sees some measure of fulfilment of the promise in Abram's active role in mediating for Sodom. Sarna adds another reason why some passive sense is likely to be intended by the *Niphal*:

[If understood as passive rather than reflexive] God's promises to Abram would then proceed in three stages from the particular to the universal: a blessing on Abram personally, a blessing (or curse) on those with whom he interacts, a blessing on the entire human race. (1989:89)

This expansion of scope is almost certainly in view, given that it follows immediately after the inverse pattern in verse 1: God called Abram to leave land, relatives and immediate family, narrowing the scope from the broadest sense of 'home' or 'people' to the most specific. Given that the *Niphal* allows both a reflexive translation or a passive, perhaps this tense is used because of its polyvalency, and forcing one of the options is an unnecessary limitation. Even in the more obvious form in Zechariah 8 it is not impossible that the blessing is more than just formulaic; the blessing may surpass the curse. The lack of specificity about all of the Genesis 12 blessings leaves open the precise nature of fulfilment, and perhaps even intends that the blessings are understood in a comprehensive way. It is likely that Abram might be meant as an example of blessing by which the nations are provoked to jealousy, but also that he would be (passively) a conduit of blessing and (actively) an agent of blessing to others. This is my view, and I find that Wenham's translation ('find a blessing') best captures a sense of polyvalency.

¹⁹ Abram is described as obeying the Lord's word, but כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר in v4 admits translation possibilities. It is commonly rendered, 'as (YHWH) had spoken', but may also be more strongly rendered as: 'as (YHWH) commanded,' or perhaps, in view of the blessings, 'according to (YHWH's) promise'. Contextually, the stronger versions have the advantage of drawing attention to Abram's full obedience to what God had said, which seems to be the stress of this passage. However, given

his property that he had accumulated, and the persons that he had acquired²⁰ in Haran. And they departed in order to go to the land of Canaan, and they arrived in the land of Canaan. ⁶ And Abram passed through the land until the (sacred) site of Shechem until the terebinth of Moreh;²¹ at that time the Canaanites were in the land.

⁷ And YHWH appeared to Abram and he said, 'To your seed I will give this land.' And he built there an altar to YHWH – the one who appeared to him. ⁸ And he moved on from there to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. He built there an altar to YHWH, and he called on the name of YHWH.²² ⁹ And Abram journeyed on journeying²³ to the Negev.

¹⁰ Now there arose a famine in the land, and so Abram went down to Egypt in order to sojourn there because the famine in the land was severe.

¹¹ And it happened as he drew near to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, 'Look, please, I know that you are a woman of beautiful appearance ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife," and they will kill me and let you live. ¹³ Please say you are my sister in order that it might go well with me²⁴ for your sake and my soul shall live on account of you.' ¹⁴ And when Abram entered

that the preceding chapters, most notably in the Creation narratives, record God's plain speech as the effective and powerful agent of His will, it is perhaps unnecessary to artificially strengthen the terminology in translation at this point.

²⁰ The phrase 'persons that he had acquired' is usually taken to mean the acquisition of servants, but Cassuto (1974:320f) believes that this phrase should rather be translated as, 'the making of the souls,' and interpreted it to mean, 'the souls that they had won.' He reasons that servants would have been included within '*recush* (property)', and that the verb 'to make' is not the one commonly used of making servants. Furthermore, he objects that the text limits the soul-acquiring to Haran, whereas if it referred to servants, this surely would have been true of Ur too. As such, he favourably cites rabbinic exposition that took this to mean the making of proselytes. This is an intriguing possibility, as it does follow Abram's experience of meeting God, and it is not unexpected that Abram should have invited others to join him. Nevertheless, the view depends a little too heavily on being certain that the author included servants within property, seeing as at the end of the chapter, the author describes Abram's time in Egypt with a detailed list of the wealth that he gathered, including separate mention of servants, which perhaps is all he is doing here in this passage. Furthermore, if it is meant as a group of proselytes, it is strange that all trace of them disappears from subsequent stories. Thus we will not follow Cassuto's reading.

²¹ Sarna (1989:91) points out that **מְקוֹם שֶׁכֶם** is a combination of words only used here. It is probably not that this is the future site of Shechem, but rather he argues that it has a special meaning of 'sacred site'. Wenham speaks of some textual traditions that substitute 'terebinth' for 'plain' in order to dissociate Abram from any connection to idolatrous practices, such as sacred groves or tree worship (1987:266f). I judge this unnecessary (see exegesis).

²² Sarna translates 'called on the name of the YHWH' as 'invoked the LORD by name' (Sarna, 1989:92). This would seem to imply that the name YHWH was known already, but there is no text before Exodus 3:15 that clearly indicates that this had happened. On the other hand, the use of the name YHWH in connection with the Patriarchs is common in Genesis, and the revelation of the name in Exodus may not be intended as new revelation of His name but rather have another purpose. It may indicate that the name was forgotten among the Israelites, or that Moses anticipated confusion over which god in Egypt would be showing them favour. Exodus 3:15 could thus be seen as God's definitive self-identification as sovereign in territory that would have seemed beyond His jurisdiction. Indeed, God's naming of Himself explicitly as 'YHWH God of your fathers' may indicate antiquity of the name itself. Thus we have no objection to Sarna's translation except that it is underdetermined, and thus we prefer the ambiguity of 'called on the name of YHWH'.

²³ V9 is slightly unusual in its double use of the infinitive absolute. Wenham says that the infinitive absolute of **נָסַע** indicates continuing action (1987:267). Thus in this text, the grammar puts strong emphasis on the fact that Abram keeps moving. It is difficult to render in English, especially if one desires to express the repetition of **הֵלֵךְ**. I have chosen not to make that attempt, but merely to express the sense of continuing action by rendering the phrase as 'journeying (**נָסַע**) on (**הֵלֵךְ**), journeying (**נָסַע**)...'.²⁴

²⁴ Abram pleads with his wife to help him so that he may 'go well and remain alive'. Sarna believes this to be an example of hendiadys (1989:95) such that the good fortune that Abram seeks is merely to stay alive. The text is structured as a parallelism:

Egypt, the Egyptians noticed the woman, because she was very beautiful. ¹⁵ And the princes of Pharaoh saw her and they praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh. ¹⁶ But with Abram²⁵ it went well for her sake; and to him came sheep and cattle, and donkeys and manservants and maidservants and female donkeys and camels. ¹⁷ But YHWH touched Pharaoh and his house with great plagues, for the matter of Sarai, Abram's wife.

¹⁸ And Pharaoh called for Abraham and said, 'What have you done to me? Why did you not tell me that she is your wife?' ¹⁹ 'Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? And I took her to me to be a wife, and now look! Your wife!²⁶ Take and go!' ²⁰ And Pharaoh commanded men and they escorted him and his wife and all his possessions away.

2.2 EXEGESIS

Genesis 12 is among the most important chapters in the Old Testament, because it marks a transition from the formative, universally focused Prologue material in Genesis to the start of Israel's national history, and it is the passage that introduces God's covenant with His elect people that becomes a touch-stone for the later Old Testament writings and on into Christian theology. In Chapter 11, we are introduced to Terah and his family, including Abram, who move from Ur and settle in Haran, but Chapter 12 begins the story of Abram himself. It begins abruptly with YHWH addressing him and making promises, principally of blessing, land, and descendants. The promises garner the most attention, and rightly so, but their setting, the material that surrounds the promises, is integral to their interpretation.

that it might go well with me	for your sake
and my soul shall live	on account of you.

Sarna's point holds if this is read as a simple synonymous parallelism, but the text is emphatic elsewhere about his growth in wealth, which would lead me to believe that 'going well' (וַיֵּטֵב) is meant to include more than just his safety. V16 says directly that Pharaoh did deal well (וַיֵּטֵב) with Abram on her account, the evidence of which was material gifts. So perhaps the parallelism is synthetic: Abram is seeking to avoid hostility and to find favour more generally, whereas staying alive is thus summative of the whole situation, because the dead cannot enjoy blessing! Sarna may be correct, which makes Abram less open to indictment, and the showering of material wealth upon Abram is perhaps merely evidence of God's ability to bless in the midst of seemingly dire circumstances. Nevertheless, I do not share Sarna's certainty and would not attempt to reflect hendiadys in translation.

²⁵ The promotion of the subject to first position is usually emphatic. In this case, emphasising 'But with Abram' (וְלִאֲבְרָם) seems to establish a contrast between Sarai's fortunes and his.

²⁶ The absence of subject and verb makes this text ambiguous. It is not clear whether Pharaoh is saying, 'Look, (here is) your wife: take her and go!' as most translations do, or saying, 'I took her to be my wife but look! (She is) your wife! Take her and go!' Although הִנֵּה usually intends 'here is', and having only the dubious authority of the Contemporary English Version behind me, I marginally favour the latter, as it better expresses Pharaoh's surprise and indignation that Abram had deceived him. If the former is preferred, Pharaoh's words merely point to the fact that he voluntarily gives Sarai back. In translation, however, I prefer to retain the ambiguity, and to reflect the clipped, barked-out style of Pharaoh's commands.

2.2.1 Preliminary analysis

[1]

The blessings are a highlight of this section and tend to draw most of the reader's attention, and so the role of 12:1 is often undervalued. It begins with God's command for Abram to 'Go'. Wenham (1987:275) points out that grammatically, the command to 'Go' is strong, whereas all the promises to bless are expressions of intentionality and subordinate to the initial command. This serves to emphasise the importance of the initial command and the contingency of the blessings upon it.

The Hebrew construction (לך-לך), literally 'Go to you', i.e. 'by yourself') 'suggests that the person mentioned is going alone and breaking away from the group' (Wenham, 1987:266). The emphasis is not merely upon going (something presumably easy for a people accustomed to nomadic life), but also upon *leaving behind*.

Dislocation from one's land and relatives did not imply merely 'starting fresh' or 'finding a new home', but rather an invitation to belong to new systems and structures. Abraham's call is not merely an invitation to relocate. The call to leave one's family implies the formation of a *new* one.²⁷ There is no overt description in Genesis 12 of the relationship into which Abraham was being brought, but leaving his 'father's house' would imply that it is familial and not just religious. It is the forsaking of one family structure in order to form another.

Abram is required to separate himself from a three-fold network of relationships. He is to 'go by himself' away from his land, his relatives, and his father's house. The scope narrows from the broadest sphere of self-identification, his nation, to the smallest, his family unit; complete dissociation is demanded. The family itself, including Lot, Sarah, and servants, once extracted from the previous structure, goes with Abraham, and is therefore not what must be left behind. But what Abraham must forsake is the sense of to whom he belongs. Naturally, this demanded trust: Abram is required to set aside the support structure and the belonging that he has, and to trade it for a miraculous future to be provided by what may have been to him an unknown God.

Verse 1 also hereby indicates that the blessings offered in the covenant were not exactly unconditional. Receiving them depended upon Abraham's trust in God's ability to bring about what was promised, placing himself under God's 'fatherhood', and it depended on his obedience to the call to leave and follow. Even if the familial associations were weaker than I propose, Abram's

²⁷ It arguably bears conceptual similarities to the marriage language in Genesis 2:24 ('Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife').

subsequent actions – building altars to YHWH in Canaan – indicates that Abram understood his call to be a radical commitment to follow YHWH as his God.

Consequently, there are early hints that there is a relational element to the promises, and it is certainly fair to infer a condition of obedience to YHWH as a fundamental part of them.

This places the promises in Chapter 12 in significant continuity with its more overtly conditional restatement in Chapter 17. Verses 7 and 8 of Chapter 17 establish the relational sphere of operation: God states twice His intention ‘to be your God and the God of your descendants after you’. The conditional element that follows does not place any demands on the family beyond the faith and obedience already implicit in the initial promise statement. Granted, the covenant sign of circumcision is new, but it functions only as a marker of belonging to God, that is, a sign of submission to YHWH’s Lordship. There is no new required demonstration of merit or ethical demand that would distance the conditions of Chapter 17 from those of Chapter 12.

The relational aspect is most certainly a key component of the covenant in Chapter 17, and indeed, in major restatements of covenant, it is this same relational covenant formula that is emphasised.²⁸ It seems safe, therefore, to infer that the call in 12:1 is indeed intended to be read in similarly relational terms. Mathews sums up:

No obligations are placed upon Abram to maintain the promises... he must only respond to the Lord’s command to ‘leave,’ an act of loyalty (2005:106).

So, the opening verse of Chapter 12 is foundational to the blessings, establishing a sphere of relationship in which the promises operate. There are not covenant conditions such that Abram is compelled to *merit* what is promised, but the initial promises are also, therefore, in continuity with subsequent covenant statements that more overtly require trust and obedience to the form of relationship that God establishes with Israel.

Finally, the contingency of the blessings upon the initial command also places the land in an interesting position. Much is made of the gift of land to Abraham, especially as it is an aspect of the promises that is repeated and elaborated upon on a regular basis in Genesis. Genesis makes reference to the promises 47 times, only 7 of which do not mention the land explicitly; 29 refer exclusively to it (Wright, 2004:78). It is such a dominant element that it comes as something of a surprise to note that the gift of the land is not among the promises made to Abraham in 12:1-3.

²⁸ Cf. Exodus 6:7; Deuteronomy 29:10-13; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Revelation 21:3 for reappearances of this covenant formula.

The absence of overt mention of the land is surprising, but it is nevertheless implicit in these verses. Abram is commanded to go *to the land* so that God will bless. The land itself is not here one of the blessings, but rather the *place* in which blessing is given.

[2-3]

The centrality of land to the promises is also implicit in the first of them in verse 2. God promises that He will make of Abraham ‘a great nation (גוֹי)’. Unlike גוֹי, עַם is a political concept and requires a territorial base (Speiser, 1964:86), which would have implied to Abram that God intended to grant him a place. Only upon arrival, in 12:7, does God show him the land and make it explicit that it is to be given to his descendants.²⁹

The next element of the promise involves giving to Abram a great name. Sarna (1989:89) observes that in the Ancient Near East, one’s name was closely tied to one’s essence, so that it was a ‘great name’ had implications for one’s reputation, esteem, and character.

The third element, that of blessing, operates in two directions: Abram is promised to be the recipient of blessing, as well as commanded to be an agent of blessing to the nations. Fertility has long been identified as an important component of blessing, and it is also a key concern within Genesis – the genealogies follow family lines, and each of the key patriarchs in Genesis suffers from infertility until God intervenes – but here the blessings are left unspecified. The lack of specificity allows for the promise to be fulfilled in a variety of ways, but it also hints at a more comprehensive *state* of good as the ultimate aim of blessing. It is noteworthy that, just as Abram was called to leave behind support and self-identity structures with a threefold narrowing of scope (nation, kin, house), here the promises of blessing undergo an threefold *expansion* of scope from Abram himself, to those associated with him, and finally to the whole world (Sarna, 1989:89). The goal of blessing is as wide and total as possible.

Abram and the patriarchs are blessed with fertility – barren wives become fertile, and crops and flocks prosper – but wealth plays a particularly strong role. Many scholars see the growth in wealth of the Patriarchs as a demonstration of the fulfilment of God’s intention to bless (cf. Mitchell, 1987:68f). Blomberg (1999:36) cites six occasions in Genesis in which their blessedness is confirmed by mention of their riches: 13:2; 20:14-16; 24:35; 26:13; 30:43; and 47:27.

²⁹ Albeit only as a tenancy; it is not placed at the Israelites’ disposal (cf. Lev 25:18,23). As I will argue below, we are probably intended to see parallels between Eden and Canaan, as both are the special places that God prepared for relationship with His people. God placed Adam in Eden but as gardener not owner, and He had no hesitation in evicting him from the garden as the penalty of rebellion. Similarly, the land of Canaan can be given without transfer of ownership.

The emphasis on wealth should not be seen as paradigmatic, however, but rather as representative. The promises to the patriarchs are never fulfilled in their lifetimes; all of the promises have a more distant future in mind. Most tellingly, the fact that the patriarchs never occupy the land of blessing means that the way in which they were blessed cannot function as a pattern for God's ultimate intention. Wealth does function as a representation or a proxy: in the absence of a Promised-Land inheritance, material abundance is symbolic of the good-will that God means to shower upon His covenant people. Patriarchal wealth was a *token fulfilment* of more comprehensive blessing.

The counterpoint to the promise of blessing is the threat of curse upon those who dishonour God's people. The text promises אָרַר, which Sarna (1989:89) defines as, 'to place under a ban, to deprive of the benefits of divine providence,' as retribution upon any who קָלַל Abram. This is a particular comfort to someone recently called to forsake his family support-structures and to follow nomadic wanderings in a foreign land. Sarna continues that as an alien in Canaan without legal protection, he would be in 'particular need of God's providential care'. Whether Abram in turn is able to be a blessing to these nations is a major concern of the latter half of this chapter.

[4]

Verses 4 and 5 record Abram's response to God's call. It is unambiguous: in response to the command to לָךְ-לָךְ, verse 4 begins, וַיֵּלֶךְ ('And he went'). Furthermore, it adds the verification, 'as YHWH had commanded', emphasising Abram's unquestioning obedience.

[5]

Verse 5 is somewhat strange as it seems redundant, largely repeating the content of verse 4. The repetition with additional emphasis of all that Abram took with him certainly adds to the gravity of the decision that Abram made, and the seriousness of his undertaking. However, there is more to this verse. Sarna (1989:90) points out that this second statement of Abram's departure for Canaan 'duplicates the phraseology and structure of 11:31', as can be seen in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Parallel phraseology

11:31b	12:5b
וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאֹר כַּשְׂדִּים לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-חָרָן וַיִּשְׁבּוּ שָׁם:	וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:
And they departed together from Ur of the Chaldees in order to go to the land of Canaan, until they arrived in Haran. And they settled there.	And they departed in order to go to the land of Canaan, and they arrived in the land of Canaan.

This connection back to the story of Terah adds an interesting dimension to the setting of the promises at the start of the chapter. Abraham's family had made an abortive attempt at leaving Babylonia for Canaan, getting as far as Haran – their homeland – and deciding not to proceed. There is likely to be some suggestion that Terah had the right idea in heading for Canaan; perhaps an Israelite reader would have been prompted to wonder whether Terah might have been the heir of the promises if he had followed through with his plan.³⁰ Either way, the mimicking of phraseology compels us to consider the differences between the two phrases, and in this case it is that Terah leaves 'together' with his family, whereas Abram was told to go 'by yourself', specifically without his family and away from his natural inheritance. Terah does not leave his household and he gets stuck in the land of his relatives.

We are left to wonder why Terah had intended to go to Canaan, but the repetition does underline that Abram's call was emphatically the command to join a new family and to leave his old allegiances behind. It may also serve to prefigure the later call to be holy and separate, to 'come out' from old practices and into the new.

Finally, this repetition may also have had importance to later readers interested in Israel's movements from places of captivity – certainly the exodus from Egypt, but perhaps even Babylonian exile – to the land chosen by God. Terah is moving in the right direction, but his plan stalls; Abram trusts and obeys so that he leaves the comfortable and enters God's plan for his history.

[6]

Abram journeys as far as Shechem and the terebinth of Moreh. This tree was obviously noteworthy enough to serve as a landmark, and almost certainly had spiritual significance to the Canaanites. Sarna (1989:91) claims that distinguished trees might have served as 'tree of life' symbols or pictures of the cosmos (connecting underworld and heaven). 'It becomes an arena of divine-human encounter', which is just what Abram experienced in that place. Canaanite religious associations with trees were such that Deuteronomy 16:21 would eventually prohibit Israel from planting them in the vicinity of the altar. Sarna lists a series of references to a tree that may indeed be the same one mentioned in Genesis 12, namely Genesis 35:4; Joshua 24:26; and Judges 9:6,37.

So, this verse indicates that Abram has travelled to a region that was home to two spiritually important Canaanite religious landmarks: this terebinth and the sacred site of Shechem. The

³⁰ If Terah is to be viewed as someone who nearly became the hero, it might add an explanation why the *toledoth* statement begins with him, rather than with Abram (Noah, for example, is the hero of his story, and *he* gets the *toledoth* statement, not his father).

intention behind the inclusion of references to Canaanite landmarks is almost certainly to characterise the land and its inhabitants as idolatrous (the Canaanites themselves are mentioned here for otherwise-obscure reasons). Abram has been given a land that is not only occupied, but also devoted to gods other than the one who called him.

[7]

God speaks to Abram again, saying ‘To your seed I will give this land.’ This confirms to Abram that he has arrived in the Promised Land. In that potentially hostile place, in the heartland of Canaanitic religion, Abram builds the first altar to YHWH, staking God’s claim to that ground.

Wenham (1987:266f) notes that some interpreters become concerned that building an altar in such a place may seem to implicate Abram in its idolatrous practices, and so they substitute the probably-religious ‘terebinth’ for ‘plain’. Such concern seems unnecessary.

Abram’s altar-building *here* of all places, in the midst of Canaanite holy places, while the Canaanites were in the land, is to be understood as an act of boldness and fidelity.³¹ Abram has been called into a covenant relationship with YHWH, he has been promised this land, and thus in faith he plants YHWH’s standard in the midst of the Canaanite worship centre. As such, minimising references to Canaanite religion obscures what seems to be the clear point of the story.

[8-9]

Having marked this as the first point of entry into God’s land of promise, Abram resumes his travels south towards the Negev. Verse 9 employs two infinitive absolutes that represent continuing action, which serves to draw strong attention to the on-going nature of Abram’s journeying. Sarna (1989:92) points out that Abram’s arrival in the Negev signals that he traversed the entire length of the Promised Land. He has not yet found rest. Birch (1991:110) says of the sojourner:

‘The sojourner (*ger*) is a resident alien; he lives in a place dependent on the hospitality of its inhabitants without full membership and rights in the community... In the text of these stories of the

³¹ There is much scholarly discussion about ‘faith’ in the Old Testament, and whether New Testament (or especially Greek) concepts such as πιστις are transferrable onto OT terminology (Childs, 1993:596ff). As I do not intend to load faith concepts with too much weight in my argument, I will define faith non-specifically as trust in YHWH’s word, and refrain from entering further into the discussion. However, it is significant to this thesis to note that there is a connection between belief in YHWH’s word and correctly ordered relationship with Him. Childs identifies Genesis 15:6 as significant in this regard, as Abram’s trust and obedience (*Hiphil* of אָמַן) lead to the declaration of him as *righteous*, that is, ‘in a right relationship with God’ (*ibid*:597). Thus I will argue that while Abram’s behaviour here demonstrates confidence in God, his immediate loss of confidence under testing demonstrates that the divine-human relationship is still not properly ordered. Testing emerges as a necessary counterpoint to God’s promises because they can only flourish when the environment of blessing (relationship with God) is in order.

promise the references to sojourning imply a being on the way to somewhere. The promise is not yet fulfilled but a journey toward it is under way.'

So the mention of sojourning emphasises that Abram remains displaced. The promises are still future: although the land has been given to Abram's seed, he is not given leave to settle, but remains an alien in the land of promise.

[10]

In verse 10, the narrator announces a famine without passing any further comment about the significance of this event to a man recently promised blessing in this place. Thus far, YHWH had been clearly directing Abram's steps; the silence at such a crucial time is surprising.

The presence of famine presented an immediate challenge to the promises that Abram had received, and the absence of explanation or instruction therefore marks this out as the first test of Abram's trust in God to do what He had said.

Without requesting or receiving guidance, he elects to seek refuge in Egypt. This decision should register concern in the mind of the reader. Although the reader of Genesis could have positive associations with descent into Egypt (knowing that God uses Joseph to secure Israel's survival through this means), the predominant association would be negative. It is in *the land* that God promised to bless him, and so departure from that place in order to seek a better fortune *in Egypt*, the land of slavery, is disconcerting.

[11-13]

As the couple nears Egypt, Abram hatches a plan to ensure his own safety and well-being. This was an understandable concern, because as someone separated from his kinsmen, he was without protection and at the mercy of his hosts. It is not clear how life was any different in Canaan. Perhaps he had been able to avoid heavily populated areas in Canaan; perhaps he was concerned that God's blessings adhered only to the land that he was now leaving; perhaps the fact of famine in Canaan had caused him to doubt that the promises were secure. Whatever the motivation for this concern, his fear of the Egyptians comes into direct contrast with God's promise to bless him and to curse his enemies. In other words, the lack of security that Abram felt on account of being without kinsmen was directly addressed by God's promise to fulfil this role.

Furthermore, given that the over-arching implication of the list of blessings promised in 12:1-3 is that God would secure his well-being, it is noteworthy that Abram's plan to present Sarai as his sister

has as its stated goal that it might 'go well' (יִטֵּב) with him. It is clear therefore that Abram's plan represents an attempt at *securing for himself* what God had already promised to give.

Abram was chiefly concerned that Sarai's beauty would attract unwanted attention, and so he requests that she assumes the role of his sister. In this way, he can ensure that his presence is not viewed as an obstacle or a threat. On the contrary, Abram seems to have been counting on having her as an apparently marriageable member of the household, so that she might attract the favour of potential suitors. Wenham (1987:288) argues that in a culture holding sterner attitudes towards adultery than our own, it is unlikely that Abram intended to allow a marriage to take place. He prefers the view that Abram hoped to have her as a bargaining chip, but delaying in actually marrying her off if suitors arose, as Laban did with his sister in order to exploit the relationship with Jacob. Either way, being brother rather than husband would make him a worthy alliance partner (it would go well with him), rather than an obstacle (he would die, she would live). Unfortunately, if he had intended to fend off suitors, his plan backfires on him when the Pharaoh³² requests Sarai, because delay and refusal would not be something a Pharaoh was obliged to accept.³³

In his petitioning of Sarai, Abram twice uses the word נָא, a particle of entreaty, indicating that he is making an earnest request of his wife, as opposed to being domineering. However, this politeness is not necessarily much of a credit to him, as the terms of his request appear heavily manipulative. In verse 12 Abram emphasises that they will not share a common fortune in Egypt: 'they will kill me and let you live.' In verse 13, he twice emphasises that his fate, whether prosperity and his death, will be *because of her*: 'that it might go well with me *for your sake* and my soul shall live *on account of you*.' He makes it clear that she has to choose whether to deceive and let him live well, or to be truthful and let him die horribly. His polite entreaty is in service of heavy manipulation. Thus, while his concerns are real, his behaviour is not commendable.

³² The text gives no clues at all to the identity of the Pharaoh in this text. This is also true of the rest of the Pentateuchal references to Pharaohs, however, and only in Kings and Chronicles are Pharaohs ever named. Strangely, the Philistine king in the parallel stories of Genesis 20 and 26 is named, which leads one to wonder why Pharaohs aren't. It may be that the information was not known to the author, or that leaving the name unstated served to universalise the reference; in other words, by excluding the name, the king of Egypt becomes representative of every king of Egypt. He is able to be symbolic of the sometime-enemy-sometime-ally south of Judah, or he is able to be treated as the same character that tangles with Moses in the Exodus. There are narrative advantages in resisting the urge to particularise the Pharaoh, but it is of little help to historical setting.

³³ Gunn and Fewell (1993:110) see in the wife-sister stories a pattern of securing self-preservation at the expense of one's wife that began already in Genesis 3. If the Garden of Eden is an implied backdrop to this scene, then it strengthens the argument that the promise of 12:1-3 is deeply relational, and it establishes 12:1-9 as parallel to man being placed in the garden. Verse 10 describes the cause of doubt in God's goodness, and verses 11-20 can be viewed as Abram's 'fall'.

[14-15]

Abram's flight into Egypt intended to solve the initial predicament – the famine – and yet served rather to raise a new one. Sarai is noticed by Pharaoh's *sarim*, his princes, and she is taken as his wife. This surely can't have been Abram's plan, though the text is silent about his response or his feelings on the matter, and indeed he remains silent as she is claimed for the king.

Sarna (1989:94) characterises Sarai's incorporation into Pharaoh's harem as a kidnapping. He adds,

'...of major concern is the emphasis on God's direct, protective intervention--just at the moment when all human resources have failed and it appears that the divine promises are to be aborted. The matriarch is recovered by the action of God, not as a result of warfare waged by the outraged husband.'

The verb (לָקַח) is *pual*, which is often intensive and makes it possible that this is a taking-by-force, but the more common active equivalent, does not seem to require any comparable intensifying of the action. If the context presented us with an 'outraged husband', this would indicate a kidnapping, but the text provides no hints about Abram's thoughts on the matter.

[16]

Unlike Sarna, the text is in no hurry to excuse Abram. It sets up a clear contrast between his behaviour and that which the terms of the promises imply ought to have been appropriate, and when it goes wrong, it is happy to hint that what has happened is his fault. It was always his stated plan to have it 'go well' with him for Sarai's sake, and the text puts it in exactly those terms ('And with Abram it went well for her sake,' 12:16). Abram's plan *worked*, implies the text, and he enjoys prosperity through his connection with the Egyptian royal family. The problem was Abram's lack of faith in *God's* plan. Sarna's attempt at preserving Abram's reputation is overly generous.

Abram had been proactive in trying to solve threats to his own well-being, whether the threat of famine or Egyptian, but now he is silent and inactive. The most kindness with which we could describe his response is 'powerless'. At no point does he consult God about any of the predicaments that he faces, not the famine, not the danger in Egypt, and not the removal of his wife. And yet the one who undertakes to solve the problem, now that it is beyond Abram's power, is God Himself.

[17]

While Abram silently prospers on account of the (pending?) marriage union with Pharaoh's house, God still intends to keep His promises. Although Pharaoh did not know Sarai was married, the secret is known to God and marrying her still counts as dishonour to God's covenant people. Being faithful to His promises and His threats, this leads to God's curse, in which He plagues (וַיַּכֶּ) Pharaoh with

plagues (נִפְּעִים).³⁴ The noun form is used regularly in the Bible, but significantly, it appears only once each in Genesis and Exodus. It is used here and in Exodus 11:1, once again of an Egyptian Pharaoh, in God's announcement that He will bring the final and most dreadful of the Exodus plagues upon him, killing the firstborn.

Hearing of a Pharaoh holding God's elect in captivity and being struck with plagues, it is hard to miss the similarities between this episode and what takes place in the Exodus. Weinfeld (1991:348) points out that the LXX specifically renders this verse in a way that connects it to key passages about the Exodus plagues. It is important to note for our purposes that unlike the Exodus, Pharaoh is the *victim* in his unwitting 'enslavement' of Sarah, and the plagues arise not out of his stubbornness and opposition to God, but out of Abram's deceit. It was Abram who struggled to believe God's word, not Pharaoh, and in so doing inflicted curses upon the Pharaoh who had been so generous to him.

Therefore, the parallels with the Exodus serve to cast *Abram* in the role of villain. Early in the chapter, he was promised that he would be a blessing to all the families of the earth, but in pursuing blessing by his own schemes and apart from trust in YHWH, his ethical responsibility not only to receive but also to become a blessing has met with immediate and worrying failure. It also indicates that God intends to be faithful to his promises, and Abraham ought to have acted trustfully in the first place. The failure to do so and the abdication of his ethical responsibility to be a blessing to the nations led instead to him being an agent of curse.³⁵

[18-19]

Somehow, Pharaoh discovers the reason for the unspecified plague and calls Abram in. Expressing obvious agitation, Pharaoh subjects him to a volley of accusatory questions. If one considers links to the Exodus, in that story, God and Moses exhort Pharaoh to 'Let my people go'. In Genesis 12, the Israelite 'hero' is completely silent, and it is the righteously indignant Pharaoh asking him to leave. It is an indictment on Abram that this episode began with God's command to 'Go' to the Promised Land, and it ends now with the same command in the mouth of a foreign king.

³⁴ Sarna (1989:97) notes that the Hebrew might suggest a play on words here, because 'afflict, plague' is also used to mean 'come into physical contact with, to harass sexually', as in the second occurrence of this story type in Genesis 20:6.

³⁵ Mathews (2005:122) argues that this episode demonstrates that God brings blessing about *in spite of* Abraham's actions, and this may be the intent, but I think that it is more accurate to see in these stories a form of success achieved apart from faith, which in turn leads to the disruption of other promises (if the comparison is not too harsh, perhaps akin to Adam's eating of a fruit good for wisdom that nevertheless results in curse). In other words, Abraham achieves his desired result (prosperity) through his own scheming, not the means of the universally beneficial blessings of God's promises.

[20]

Following Pharaoh's command, the family returns to Canaan with 'plunder', again calling to mind God's provision for the later Israelites in Exodus. This time, it is ill-gotten gain, not gifts voluntarily given; this time the family departs in shame, not in victory; and this time Pharaoh doesn't send an army to snatch them back, he commissions an escort to make sure that the source of curse leaves.

Abram's departure also shares a similarity to 12:5. In both texts, Abram 'takes and goes' to Canaan. In verse 5, it was a departure with family and possessions, trusting the word of God. In verse 20, it is a departure at the command of Pharaoh. Whether or not there is an implied criticism of Abram in this chapter for never consulting YHWH in his trials is unclear. But one way or another, the man who has not yet fully obeyed the command of God will now be compelled to obey the word of Pharaoh. Indeed, he leaves with greater possessions, but after a failure to believe what God had promised.

2.2.2 Structure

Having examined the contents of the chapter, we turn our attention to its structure. Genesis 12 holds together as a carefully planned unit. It divides into five scenes³⁶ that include an opening speech followed by a character's response to the speech. The scenic divisions are as follows:

Promise and obedience

1-3 God speaks promises to Abram

4-6 Abram responds in obedience

Arrival and faith

7a God identifies the land of promise

7b-9 Abram responds in faith and worship

Testing and departure

10 Abram responds to famine

Scheming and success

11-13 Abram speaks to Sarai to secure blessing

14-17 Abram is 'blessed'

³⁶ Amit (2001:49ff) suggests various common ways in which biblical authors have arranged narratives, such as pediment structure, etc. but scene change appears to be the one employed by the author of this chapter.

Curse and return

18-19 Pharaoh speaks to Abram about the curse

20 Abram returns to the Promised Land

In each case, a shift in the story is introduced by means of a single speech event. It is a feature of this text that there are three speakers but no dialogue; we are never allowed to hear what the characters think of what is said. We may only observe and evaluate their response.

Of course, it is apparent that the central event in this structural analysis (verse 10) shows divergence from the expected pattern, but rather than this being evidence of a poor fit of this passage to its proposed structure, the divergence appears to me to be calculated and intentional, and in fact essential to proper understanding of this chapter.

When the famine arises, we are primed by the pattern of the story thus far to expect God to speak to Abram, perhaps to warn or instruct him. A strong case that this is an intentional omission is provided by the parallel story in the life of Isaac (Genesis 26:1), which we will discuss again below. In that story, God *does* provide the expected caution and instructions, which shows that drought in the Promised Land was an anomaly that demanded explanation.³⁷ This was true most of all for Abram who had no precedent for it and no history with YHWH, yet God is surprisingly silent. There is no speech given that might direct his response.

2.2.3 Synopsis

Abram's family had once intended to settle in Canaan, but had been waylaid by family concerns in Haran. God calls Abram to make the radical decision to forsake all of those family support structures and all of his position and security in his homeland, and to begin a journey of promise with Him. YHWH is (presumably) an unknown God and Abram is called to settle in an unknown land, but the fact of this remarkable call and the hope of a blessed future motivate him to undertake this journey.

The promises to Abram are not given for their own sake as though God merely wishes for His chosen to have good things and to enjoy life. As much as the fulfilment of the promises might eventually bring about wealth and happiness, that is not the goal, and nor is the content of the promises the most significant thing about the opening verses of Genesis 12.

³⁷ This famine in chapter 26 is announced with specific reference back to the one in Abram's time, which therefore invites comparison and contrast.

More importantly than the descriptions of personal gain, the promises are preceded by the radical command for Abram to 'leave behind' and to form a new association of trust with YHWH alone. The call of Abram and the value of the promises that he receives must surpass even the value that he places on family, but they promise him also a new family relationship with YHWH and the hope of a fertile future that had thus far been denied him.

Furthermore, the blessings that motivate Abram are not directed only at his good and the good of his descendants; they culminate in the blessing of all the families of the earth. Abram is not only the possessor of the privilege of God's blessing, but he has the responsibility to be an agent of blessing to those around him. The promises to Abram are directed towards an ambitious, global goal.

Upon hearing God's speech, Abram's response is unambiguous. He carries out what is demanded, and upon discovering the location of the Promised Land, he engages in a series of courageous acts of faith, establishing places of worship of YHWH in the midst of Canaanite-occupied territory.

At this point, the encouraging fulfilment of all that had been asked and offered is suddenly interrupted by the report of a famine. Abram had been promised blessing and fertility in this place, he had behaved faithfully – courageously even – and yet this goodness had not materialised. This is the first test of Abram's trust in God to do what He had said.

Sarna (1989:93) observes that famine seemingly due to natural causes is rare in scripture, yet experienced by each of the patriarchs. He continues,

In the book of Genesis, the Promised Land is not 'flowing with milk and honey,' and the divine promises are not intended to bring quiet and repose to their recipients... Living in the land is difficult, sometimes precarious. All this continually impinged upon the religious consciousness of Israel. It generated a heightened sense of dependence upon God's protection and a more intense awareness of His mysterious workings.

For God to bring about famine in the lives of each of those to whom he promised blessing in the land is surely significant, although we are left largely to speculate as to its meaning. Certainly what Sarna says above has validity: God communicates that blessing depends upon the divine-human covenant relationship, and that dependence upon Him takes precedence over the receipt of blessing.

This can be taken further. Firstly, we can conclude from this that the promises of blessing are in no way mechanical. Abram has thus far proven completely faithful: he received the command to go and he went; he arrived in religiously significant Canaanite territory and boldly represented the name of YHWH across the land. In response, he does not receive peace, prosperity, and freedom from

hardship, but rather famine that compels him to leave. Clearly the blessing transaction is not one of merit-payment, because Abram *did* merit it by his obedience, yet did not receive. Blessing is given by grace on God's terms, and tests of faith that may involve hardship are part and parcel of the covenant relationship, even when the relationship appears strong.

Secondly, we are prompted to consider *why* hardship and tests of faith are necessary; why does the Promised Land not become an environment of total blessing for Abram and his seed? The answer is again related to the purpose of God's promises, which is to establish a certain kind of *relationship*, not to provide prosperity for its own sake. Genesis 3 has sketched the problem of human rebellion and greed that stands in the way of relationship with God and which introduced curse. Even in Abram, the threat of sin and rebellion remains, which is always an underlying threat to the covenant relationship.³⁸ YHWH must test allegiance to ensure that His people know dependence upon Him, rather than mere desire for prosperity. The former is faith; the latter is one of its opposites: greed, which is idolatry.³⁹

Therefore, we conclude that the absence of a speech event to explain the famine or to direct Abram marks this out as a test of his fidelity, and the presence of famine illustrates the need for continual dependence upon God. It is only in the environment of properly defined relationship with Him that the promise of blessing can be appropriately enjoyed. Prospering is characteristic of God's favour, but it is not an end in itself.

Verse 11 begins the new section, this time with Abram, not God, as the speaker. While Abram had previously been responding to the direction of YHWH, he now takes his own initiative and leaves the Promised Land for Egypt. It is clear that his plan represents a significant weakening in the fidelity of the patriarch, not merely because it involves leaving the place to which he was told to go, but because he is presented as attempting to secure for himself what God had already promised. God promised blessing, but Abram finds his own route to the receipt of good. God promised to curse those who dishonour him, but Abram employs deceit to provide the protection that he now lacked outside of his homeland.

³⁸ Abram repeatedly vacillates between high acts of faith and obedience, and then shameful descents into unbelief and autonomy, culminating in that last great test in Genesis 22. Testing performs an obviously necessary role in Abram's life, because while the concept of 'sin' is not explicitly identified as the obstacle, the consistency of trust in God's word is not evident. This was the same problem that Adam had in the Garden, and that is what we now would call sin.

³⁹ So argues St Paul: Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5

The text describes his plan as a success – it achieved all of the goals for which he employed it – but the undesirable consequences reveal the bad plan for what it is. Abram achieves good for himself, but at the expense of his wife and the house of Pharaoh. Outside the parameters set for blessing, the bid for prosperity proves to be a curse. Abram fails to be a blessing to the nations.

The episode ends with Pharaoh angrily commanding what YHWH had invited at the start: Go!

2.2.4 Conclusions

Exegesis of this pericope has suggested the following conclusions of particular interest to the subject of prosperity:

- In verse 1, what is clear in later covenant statements is hinted at here: relationship with God is the sphere in which blessing operates. Abram is called out of one family structure and network of relationships, and called to unite himself to another: dependence upon God, trust, and obedience. The narrative episode that ends the chapter illustrates that a self-reliant approach to blessing inadvertently brings curse.
- Verse 1 also commands Abram to ‘go to the land’ with the blessings dependent thereupon. It is possible that this intends to identify the Promised Land as the location of blessing. It is not itself among the blessings, but the setting in which blessing will be given.
- Verses 2-3 are non-specific about the content of blessing, but they indicate a circle of blessing of increasing scope. This suggests that they should be understood in comprehensive terms, not overtly focused upon, say, fertility or wealth, though these receive the most immediate attention.
- Verse 9 demonstrates that blessing is not automatic and not given as reward. Abram’s feats of trust and obedience meet with further *testing*, not the blessing he may have expected.⁴⁰
- The episode with Pharaoh illustrates that there is an ethical dimension to the promises: God does not prevent Abram from bringing undeserved curse upon the Egyptians. The gift of blessing to God’s elect is not so that good can be selfishly enjoyed. Being a blessing is as important as receiving a blessing, and sin and human autonomy are threats to God’s intention to bless. If, as Gunn and Fewell suggest (see footnote 33), there is conscious mimicry of Creation and Fall, there is an even stronger implication that sin and failure to

⁴⁰ Kaiser (1988:153f) identifies eudaemonism (‘that ethical position that stresses that goodness, happiness, and material rewards always come from satisfactory ethical actions’) as a principle commonly connected to OT thinking by so-called prosperity preachers. This passage is a significant challenge to that view, because not only does Abram *not* experience rewards for his acts of faith in verses 1-8 – he experiences famine – but also he *does* receive prosperity as a result of his decidedly unsatisfactory ethical actions in Egypt.

trust God stand as threats to the receipt of blessing as God intends it.⁴¹ What Walther Eichrodt (1967:288) says of the lessons of faith demonstrated in the Abram cycle is an apt summary of the required relationship sketched in this episode:

'There is an emphatic indication that the content of the covenant cannot be actualised except by the complete self-commitment of Man to God in personal trust.'

2.3 INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Genesis 12 is a pivotal passage, standing as it does as a bridge between the Prologue of Genesis and the history of Israel. It has important relationships to passages before and after.

2.3.1 Blessings as answers to curse

Although there is reason to treat the Prologue as distinct from the Patriarchal narratives, the blessings offered to Abram are integrated into the storyline that chapters 1-11 establish. Birch (1991:72) points out that the creation narratives have been influenced by the worldviews of other cultures, but have altered these traditions in the light of their knowledge of God. The end product of these interactions is thoroughly God-centred and now appears at the head of the scriptures, which lends them theological prominence:

'Coming at the beginning of the canon, these narratives establish a theological and moral universe as much as a physical one'.

Given that the call of Abram is a second 'creation narrative' – that is, it describes the origins story of God's elect, called into being by the word of YHWH – it is obligatory that we compare and evaluate the stories in order to find Abram's place in the overall storyline.

There seems to be further invitation for comparison in the way that Abram is introduced. His introduction is virtually identical to that of Noah, with a genealogy from a key ancestor and a *toledoth* statement. Hamilton (2007:255) points out that there are ten generations listed between Adam and Noah, and ten again between Noah's son and Abram. There seems to be an explicit intention to connect Abram to these key figures of blessing and curse. Hamilton's paper argues more generally that the blessings in chapter 12 can be understood as a direct response to material from the Prologue. Wenham also holds such an opinion:

⁴¹ Though not of course to prosperity itself. Abram received prosperity, but left a trail of curse behind him. Similarly, it is possible for us to be successful without actually being under God's blessing.

The promises first made to Abraham in 12:1-3 begin to repair that hopeless situation. The fivefold blessing here counteracts the five curses that have been pronounced earlier. (1987:li)

This is a fruitful suggestion, provided that it is not overworked. Firstly, the blessings and curses are arguably fourfold. The curse in 5:29 is merely a restatement of an earlier one, and two of the occurrences of בָּרַךְ in Genesis 12 belong to a single blessing. Also there clearly is not direct correspondence between initial curses and subsequent blessings. Look at Table 2.2 below:

TABLE 2.2: Curses and blessings

Genesis 1-11	Genesis 12:1-3
The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you...' (3:14)	I will bless you and make your name great,
...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. (3:17) ...and called his name Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands. (5:29)	so that you will be a blessing.
And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. (4:11)	I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse,
Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers. (Genesis 9:25)	and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Although the blessings are not framed as direct redress, there may have been a conscious intention to replicate in the blessings the number of times 'curse' appeared in the preceding literature, and even the correspondence in number is accidental, there is almost certainly an intention to address the *theme* of curse that pervades the first 11 chapters.

Canaan as new Eden

When God establishes for his new family a land characterised by blessing, there appears to be intentional similarity to the Garden of Eden, which performed exactly that role in the Creation narratives. Direct allusions to language of Eden are absent; for example, there is no overt connection of the Promised Land to the 'walled garden' motif of Genesis 2. The fact that the characterisation of Canaan as a new Eden requires us to reinterpret the forms is not an insurmountable obstacle, however, as the prophets will later have few qualms about doing the same thing when rendering the 'Promised Land' motif as a 'Promised City', Zion.

If it is the author's intention to cast Canaan as a new Eden, then there are a few observations that we can draw from their similarities and differences:

- **Abram's blessing to the nations is restorative:** When Adam was ejected from God's garden, he was barred from God's presence and the Tree of Life. He experienced curse and death, and subjected all mankind to this condition of curse. For Abram to be promised divine access and an Eden-like land indicates a path of reversal of curse. This in turn means that the blessing of all mankind, and not merely Abram and his family, assumes primary importance among the blessings; it is by this reckoning the ultimate *goal* of Abram's call.
- **God is characteristically generous and liberal:** What emerges from the nature of Eden, from God's actions in the Prologue, and from the promises to Abram is the strong sense that God's wrath is not ontologically primary, but rather responsive to a world deserving of it. Wrath is a necessary reaction to temporal rebellion, but not a fixed, eternal state of being for God. On the contrary, God's creation of and intention for the world is shot through with blessing and liberality and care, such that we recognise this as an element of His character that should be seen as primary and inalienable. God's gifts of wealth, peace, and plenty are enshrined in His creating and in His dealing with the world. Although, as this text shows, human sinfulness is capable of corrupting divine blessing (in the sense that prosperity can easily be treated as an end in itself and become greed), God nevertheless *must* bless because it communicates something essential about His character.
- **Testing is necessary while sin exists:** Eden could exist as a place of unbroken fruitfulness and blessing because relationship with God was also unbroken. As soon as sin entered, Eden had to be withdrawn. Canaan could be Eden-like, but while sin exists, it could not offer unbroken blessing. Because God's blessings and human sinfulness do not mix well, the Promised Land must necessarily also be a place of testing, because properly ordered relationship with God is the necessary environment of blessing; while humankind remains blighted by sin, the divine-human relationship needs constantly to be maintained.

2.3.2 Blessing as a response to Babel

Wright (2004:49) argues that the location of the promises of blessing in Genesis suggests that they are intended as a response not only to curse in the Prologue in general, but also to the immediately preceding account of total human rebellion in Babel. The content of at least some of the blessings does suggest that this is the intention. Note the parallels in Table 2.3 below:

TABLE 2.3: Parallels between Babel and Abram

Babel	Abram
The nations unite to build a city	Abram is promised a nation
They desire a great name	Abram is promised a great name
The nations are punished with scattering	By Abram will all nations be blessed

The similarity serves to bolster the idea that the blessings offered to Abram have international restoration in mind. Additionally, they contribute to the understanding of the blessing of a great name. This promise is slightly unexpected, given that the cursed gathering at Babel had the establishment of a great name as its chief goal, and a primary reason for God's action against them. Perhaps the key difference is that at Babel the intention was to raise a name for man in defiance of God, whereas Abraham's great name operated within God's purpose to restore mankind to proper relationship with Him.

In immediate fulfilment of this blessing, Abraham is described as becoming great (24:35), and Isaac as being envied by other nations because of his wealth (26:14). However, just as wealth stood as a temporary sign of blessing until the inheritance of the land itself could institute more comprehensive blessing, so also the promise of a great name was directed at the time when the promises of land and nationhood were active. In the covenant, a great name had national emphasis rather than individual, and aimed at representing YHWH among the scattered nations. We see an example of its fruition in Deuteronomy 4:6-8:

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Thus the ultimate purpose in granting a great name was that its greatness should be attributed to name of YHWH, and He should be elevated 'in the sight of the peoples'. So perhaps there is a sense in which the greatness of Abram's name was meant to provoke jealousy among those who were outsiders to the promise. In combination with the idea that restoration of outsiders is God's plan, the blessing of a great name takes on a missional flavour, rather than being directed towards accumulation of wealth (as the form that it took for the Patriarchs might suggest).

The blessing of a great name features significantly again in 2Samuel 7:9, in which David plans to build a house for YHWH's name. YHWH declines and responds by promising to make David's name

great. The national and international hope embodied in this blessing thus gets funnelled into the Messianic figure by whom restoration is set to come.

2.3.3 Promised seed

The promise in Genesis 12:7 also has significant intertextual reference, because God particularly directs it at Abram's *seed*.

This is important because 'seed' has already been identified as significant in Genesis 3:15. Genesis 3:15 follows the Fall of man and forms part of the judgment upon the Tempter. God says that the *seed of the woman* will bruise/crush the Serpent's head (יְשׁוּפֵד רֹאשׁ).⁴²

There is debate about the precise meaning of שׁוּפ (to bruise, crush etc.) in this verse. Wenham denies that there is much importance in the discussion, however, rather placing emphasis firstly on the fact that as an imperfect verb form, it implies a long struggle between the two sides, and secondly, as a curse upon the Serpent, it implies eventual defeat at the hands of man (1987:80).

Hamilton (2007:269f) argues strongly for the idea that the promise of a Serpent-crushing 'Seed of the Woman' in Genesis 3:15 has significance to the subsequent storyline of Israel's history, including a firm link between this promise and the promises given to Abraham in Genesis 12. He offers as evidence a series of texts that he believes show a connection between Serpent-crushing imagery (the crushing of Israel's enemies) and Abrahamic promise language. The clearest of these is Psalm 72, which alludes to Genesis 3 with the phrases, 'May he... crush the oppressor!' (v4), and, 'May... his enemies lick the dust!' (v9), and to Genesis 12 with, 'May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!' (v17).⁴²

It seems likely, then, that Genesis 3:15 was understood by the final editor of Genesis and his earliest readers to be a hint of the means by which resolution of the predicament of sin and death spoiling creation would take place. The plot of Genesis can be understood as a search for the seed of Eve ('the living') who will defeat the seed of the Serpent and signal return to Eden for all mankind.

This adds new significance to the Prologue's preoccupation with genealogies, and it lends greater moment to God's insistence on bringing about promised seed through particular women (barren

⁴² That Genesis 3:15 influenced the Jewish view that people could be divided into the faithful and the wicked seems clear to me in the NT curse uttered by John the Baptist – a man self-consciously dividing the nation in this way: those viewed by John to be enemies of the Promised Messiah (the embodiment of Abrahamic blessing) he calls, 'Brood of vipers', almost certainly a reference to the 'seed of the Serpent'.

ones as it turns out). This is perhaps why Ishmael is blessed, but not acceptable as Abram's promised seed; it is the seed of the woman that counts too.

2.3.4 Other wife-sister episodes

The episode with Pharaoh in Genesis 12 establishes a type-scene formula that is repeated in similar fashion twice more in Genesis: again with Abram in Philistia (Genesis 20), and once with Isaac, also in Philistia (Genesis 26). A comparative study of these episodes – where similarities and differences exist – reveals the cumulative point of the wife-sister stories. We will discuss them stage-by-stage.

Reason for Journeying (Genesis 12:9-13; 20:1-2a; 26:1-7)

In Genesis 20, Abraham's reasons for sojourning and his concerns that led him to practise the deceit a second time are not given, at least not in the beginning.

In Genesis 26, Isaac's reasons match Abram's reasons from Genesis 12. The author even acknowledges the first famine as an intentional means of calling to mind the first wife-sister story. There is a significant difference between the stories, of course, as Genesis 26 includes a long covenant-renewal epiphany, in which YHWH forbids Isaac to go to Egypt. Instead, in spite of the famine, God promises to bless Isaac in the land of Canaan, commanding him not to go down to Egypt for blessing, but rather to seek it in the land in which it is promised.

This covenant-renewal speech emerges as the most significant detail in the Genesis 26 version, as the remaining stages of the story are short and add little to the formula. It is of utmost importance for the purposes of this study, because firstly it implies that Abram's journey down to Egypt was indeed an act of disbelief in God's promise to bless in Canaan (even in the face of famine); but secondly, and more importantly still, 26:3 states explicitly that God's promises to bless are to be *associated particularly with the Promised Land*. This does not mean that God's people will be *unable* to prosper outside of its borders – Abram succeeds (albeit illegitimately) in Egypt – and nor does it mean that God is *incapable* of bringing success and prosperity outside of its borders – He demonstrates His universal sovereignty in the stories of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther, for example. What it does demonstrate is that it is God's intention to bring about His promise to bless only within the parameters that He has defined.

To return to Isaac then, in spite of God's promise to bless, and in continuity with his father's behaviour, he opts for the deceit out of fear for his safety, a fear that proves to be unfounded.

Wife taken (Genesis 12:14-15; 20:2b; n/a)

In the pattern established by Genesis 12, the next scene involves the wife being noticed by the king of that land, which presumably rendered her 'brother' helpless to decline the marriage offer.

Genesis 20 pares this part of the story down to its essentials, dispensing with any locals admiring her beauty. Abimelech merely 'sends' and 'takes'. Genesis 26 dispenses with this stage altogether, because of course Isaac does not lose his wife at all. The king, Abimelech again, is more circumspect this time, perhaps knowing better than to impose on (or trust) this family.

God's intervention (Genesis 12:16-17; 20:3-7; 26:8)

In this stage, the problem typically gets out of hand and the 'hero' is proven helpless. God must intervene. In the first story, Abram presumably feels bad about the loss of his wife, but the text omits any note of remorse or woe, and leaves him silent while he sets about enjoying the benefits of Pharaoh's favour. YHWH does act, however, bringing plagues upon Pharaoh, and thus remaining faithful to His promise to curse any who dishonours Abram.

In Genesis 20, God does likewise, but the author leaves the comment about the plague to later. Instead, what is emphasised is God's appearance to Abimelech in order to expose Abraham's wrongdoing and to offer a warning before the problem became irreparable.

The Genesis 26 account has a very short intervention stage too, because Isaac's plan had not been complicated by high-powered marriage proposals. In fact, they had been in the land 'a long time' perhaps indicating that there was not the dangerous interest in Rebekah that he had feared, which had caused him to lie in the first place.⁴³

Genesis 12 had not made it clear how long Sarai had been in Pharaoh's house or whether their marriage had been consummated. Omission of these facts leaves the matter ambiguous, but, given that the Lord's intervention in both subsequent stories aims particularly at preserving the matriarchs' honour, it is probable that this was the case in the first account too.

⁴³ The length of time in the region might alternatively mean to indicate that Isaac had been living under this deceit, and consequently hanging the threat of curse over them, for a dangerous amount of time. Abimelech himself does seem to have noticed the woman, because he knows that she is supposed to be Isaac's sister, and the fact that he discovers the deceit by his own observation might suggest that he was keeping an eye on the couple.

Confrontation (Genesis 12:18-19; 20:8-14; 26:9-11)

In each of the stories, the king summons the patriarch to appear before judgment. In Genesis 12, Abram is completely silent before his accuser, just as he was silent when she was taken. He is completely at fault.

In Genesis 20, Abraham does speak, filling in the reasons for the deception that had been left out at the start of the episode. This version of the story dispensed with all extraneous detail in the first two stages of the story cycle, moving us as quickly as possible to Abimelech's dream and Abraham's self-defence. This clear priority of information flags this exchange as the reason for the author's inclusion of an apparent 'duplicate' story in Abraham's history. In it we are able to judge development in Abraham's character since the first wife-sister story.

Of course the most noticeable feature is what has not changed: Abraham is perpetuating the same deceit in distrust of God's promises to him. It is no accident that this story is immediately followed in chapter 21 by the opening of Sarah's womb (God's ultimate act of faithfulness to Abraham, and counterpoint to the closing of wombs inflicted upon Abimelech), and then in chapter 22 the ultimate testing of Abraham's faith in the call to sacrifice the son of promise.

But the differences are more important still. In God's appearance to Abimelech, the important detail is the new announcement of Abraham as a prophet, and his role is to intercede (וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל). In the midst of Abraham's personal failure to be a blessing to Abimelech, God nevertheless establishes his mediatory role as administrator of healing and life. During the confrontation, then, Abimelech interrogates Abraham as to the reason for bringing sin upon his kingdom, but Abimelech invites the prophetic role with the pointed question, 'What did you see?' Abram's response identifies the absence of the fear of God in Abimelech's kingdom, which is both the reason for Abraham's fear and resultant lack of trust. But having been caught out again, it is also a strong and fearless declaration of fidelity to YHWH, given that it was to polytheists, not atheists that he was speaking. It is God's intention to make Abraham a blessing in spite of himself, and also to cause Abraham to represent the name of YHWH among the nations.

Abimelech's response is unlike Pharaoh's. Abraham is not commanded to leave. On the contrary, while Abraham had not benefitted materially from his deception this time, once he is revealed as prophet, Abimelech responds with favour and blesses him with the return of his wife, gifts of wealth, and the invitation to find asylum in the best of the land.

The Genesis 26 version sees Isaac given a regal pledge of protection: no-one may touch Isaac or his wife. The word 'touch' makes its appearance in each of the stories, with Pharaoh 'touched' (נגע) by God with plagues (בְּנִעָיוֹ) in Genesis 12, Abimelech being prevented from touching Sarah in Genesis 20, and Isaac being protected from being touched here.

Aftermath (Genesis 12:9-13; 20:15-18; 26:12-14)

In each of the three stories, we see God keeping His covenant promises in marvellous ways. Firstly, after Pharaoh had bonded Abram to Egypt through marriage, thus endangering the connection to the land God intended for him, God saw to it that an Exodus-like eviction took place, forcing him to return to the land in which he belonged. Even though Abram had faithfully seen to his own prosperity, God allowed the 'plundering of Egypt' to be retained.

In the second account, Abraham is allowed to stay in the land and maintains good relations with Abimelech. Moreover, because of God's visitation, Abimelech voluntarily blesses the family with 1000 pieces of silver.

In the third story, the king's protection also proved to be providential, allowing Isaac even to sow seed and to reap an incredible harvest so that he prospered greatly.

The missing patriarch

The reason for repeating this device with Isaac may also intend to say something about Jacob: the patriarch who does not present his wife as his sister.

Abram and Isaac both enriched themselves at the *expense of other families*, rather than being a blessing to them. By contrast Jacob also gained blessing by deception, but *not* by following his fathers' pattern. Jacob's prosperity was grasped at the expense of *his own family*, deceiving Esau, Isaac, and Laban respectively (although in the latter Jacob had at least found a kindred spirit among his kin who gave as good as he got).

It is also possible that the same ideas inherent in the wife-sister episodes are *not* missing from the Jacob cycle; they are merely turned back on him. The main idea is that the husband uses his wife as a bargaining chip with the intention of delaying marriage long enough to secure well-being for the family. Laban pulls a very similar deceit upon Jacob, except that this time it's a real sister being offered as a wife. Similarly to the other wife-sister stories, the plan is to delay: Laban manages to delay for a full seven years, using Jacob to secure wealth. Similarly to the other stories, the plan is to

offer someone as a wife who is unexpectedly a sister: Laban, on the marriage day, gives the sister in marriage, but in this case it is the wrong sister.

Perhaps there is even a parallel in the curses that result from the deceit. Where the kings in the other stories experienced cessation of fertility in their land, Jacob engineers the fruitful growth of his flock and the effective infertility of Laban's, and there is also the matter of the infertility of the beloved sister, Rachel, versus the fertility of the unloved, Leah. It is at least curious that the same theme of infertility is so strongly present in the story.

So it is possible that each of the Patriarchs passes through the same type scene as a test of faith. In Jacob's case, the deceiver *extraordinaire* is for once not the perpetrator of the deceit but the victim.

2.3.5 Test of faith

The final intertextual note concerns Abram's failure to entrust his own life to God in Genesis 12:12, choosing instead to save his life and his prosperity through deceitful means. His failure under testing here is overwhelmingly reversed in Chapter 22.

In Genesis 22, God stands as the obstacle to His own promises: He insisted that Isaac was the son of promise, not Ishmael (whom Abram had borne again in an attempt to secure in his own way what God had promised), and yet He also commands that Isaac be sacrificed. If Abram chooses to hold back his son from God, it would indicate disbelief in God's promises and the decision to keep the good that he has, rather than risk it on what the future promises. However, if he chooses to sacrifice Isaac, it would indicate that he believes that God's promises can overcome even death. Abram had previously chosen his own life and well-being over God's promises. In Genesis 22 he is forced to exercise total trust that God can do what He says, even miraculously and in the face of death. When Abram obeys, God reissues the covenant promises:

'By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.' (Genesis 22:16-18)

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

Having completed the exegesis and some intertextual study, we can draw the following conclusions about prosperity:

2.4.1 The content of prosperity: Broad scope of blessing

It is clear from this passage that in addressing the loss of Eden to curse, God expresses His character by speaking blessing to Abram and his seed.

We also note from Genesis that there is already a broad range of blessings that arise in fulfilment. For it to 'go well' with Abram, he speaks in terms of preservation of life and freedom from hostility, as well as experiencing increase in wealth. All three of the Patriarchs receive symbolic fulfilment of the promises in the receipt of wealth. God opening wombs also emerges as a token of the promise of fertility.

2.4.2 The ethics of prosperity: Generosity

The blessings are *goal directed*, aiming at the ultimate restoration of blessing to *all* nations, especially given that the nations were subject to curse as a result of rebellion at Babel. Prosperity obtained by means that bring curse upon the nations is condemned.

2.4.3 The environment of prosperity: The Promised Land

Comparison of the three wife-sister stories demonstrates that there is a strong – perhaps exclusive – connection of the promises of blessing to God's land. This is best evident in Isaac's story, in which he is commanded not to leave the Promised Land because it is God's intention to bless *there*.

While the land is often described in Genesis as a gift, this needs to be held in tension with other witnesses to its role in Israel's life. Parallels made with the Garden of Eden would suggest a gift of tenancy rather than ownership. Secondly, in Israel's later history, the land is referred to as a *loan* to the Israelite families, not property that they may dispose of as they wish (e.g. Leviticus 25:23-24). Thus, it is clear that the land is not 'signed over' to the Israelites as though it is a material asset.⁴⁴ It is perhaps best viewed as standing for God's presence in His good creation. Thus it represents the whole body of blessing: If covenant relationship with YHWH is the sphere in which blessing flows, the 'Promised Land' is its environment.

⁴⁴ For example, it would in no way be the parallel of 'a nice house' in any other age or part of the world. The point is not so much that Canaan is land, but rather that it is *God's* land. 'Promised Land' is meant to be viewed as a gift because God is there, not because real estate is valuable.

2.4.4 The sphere of prosperity: Relationship

The blessings promised to Abram are not given for their own sake, but as a feature of the reversal of the curses in the Prologue, and as characteristic of restored relationship with God (perhaps a restoration of Eden-like conditions).

Secondly, famine in the Promised Land is common to each of the Patriarchs. Testing of fidelity emerges as a necessary accompaniment to blessing, because of the fact that the blessings are not an end in themselves. They are characteristic of properly ordered relationship with God, and so testing is required in order to forge the desired relationship, which particularly involves trust in God's word. The blessings received outside of properly ordered relationship with God – such as the attempt to carve out the blessing of a great name at Babel, and the blessing of peace and prosperity that Abram seeks in Egypt – are destructive and bring curse. The combination of prosperity with recipients prone to sin is dangerous. Testing maintains the order of relationship.

Thirdly, when comparing Abram's departure from the land with Isaac being told to stay, there emerges a contrast: Abram's departure represented his attempt to secure blessing for himself. Isaac on the other hand meets the challenge of famine by trusting God to fulfil His promise to bless. It is God's intention to bless as a feature of being in relationship with Him, and on His terms, not it seems by virtue of merit or reward.

2.4.5 The dynamics of prosperity: Absence of cause-and-effect

It is evident in this story that there is not a mechanical relationship between obedience and prosperity. Rather than rewarding Abram's faith and obedience with immediate bestowal of promised blessing, God gives him famine and further testing. Conversely, when Abram left the land for Egypt and behaved contrary to the promises, he was capable of securing wealth for himself (but at great cost to Sarai, and at the expense of curse upon the Egyptians).

.....

The promises that form the foundation of the covenant with Israel therefore emphasise the land as the environment of blessing, ordered relationship with YHWH as its sphere, and the necessity of overcoming the effects of sin if blessing is to be enjoyed and curse banished. The attempt to secure prosperity outside of these parameters invites a trail of destruction in its wake.

3. DEUTERONOMY 6

Deuteronomy 6 is famous for containing the *Shema*, a statement of faith of Israel, repeated daily by religious Jews. Yet there is much in the passage that speaks both of the place of blessing in the life of Israel, and the potential for idolatry and curse.

3.1 DATE AND *SITZ IM LEBEN* OF DEUTERONOMY

The dating Deuteronomy influences what one is able to say about its meaning and especially what one is able to infer about the beliefs and practices of a particular era of Israelite history. Whatever decision one makes about its dating has a strong influence upon its interpretation. McConville (2002:28) puts it starkly, saying,

‘Interpretation of Deuteronomy now regularly looks for its exilic or post-exilic audience as a key factor in its understanding.’

If, as some scholars say, Deuteronomy came into being in the late monarchy (or later still), then the text has little or nothing to say about Moses and his time, and it calls into question any judgements made on the basis of Deuteronomy of the characters and events appearing in Joshua-Kings.

As I have stated in my assumptions, I have not found that there is sufficiently secure evidence presented in historical criticism to warrant the belief that Deuteronomy *originated* late, as opposed to being an early document that was *edited* late. Furthermore, arguments for the dating of layers of redaction or for identifying theological developments between sources seem to me to be too subjective and too open to alternative interpretation for the results to carry sufficient weight.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See for example McConville’s (2002:31) brief critique of Weinfeld’s ‘Name Theology’, wherein Weinfeld argued that Deuteronomy represents a ‘secularisation’ of God’s presence on the basis that Deuteronomy allegedly emphasises only the presence of His ‘name’. McConville demonstrates that this terminology can easily be accounted for with no such revision of the theology of God’s presence. He retorts, ‘The whole theory of a secularising, demythologising Deuteronomy is based, in my view, on doubtful premisses such as this.’

Given that my view is contentious, I have attempted to recount some of the key arguments and to defend my view in 7.5 Appendix E.

Thus, in this chapter, should it prove relevant, I will assume that the theology of Deuteronomy can be said broadly to be known to and applicable to early eras of Israel's history.

3.2 TRANSLATION

¹ And this is the commandment,⁴⁶ the prescriptions and the judgements that YHWH your God commanded (me) to teach you to do in the land that you are crossing over there to possess,
² in order that you fear YHWH your God to keep all his prescriptions and his commandments that I am commanding you – you and your son, and your son's son – all days of your life and in order that your days may be lengthened.

³ And hear, O Israel, and be watchful to do, that it shall go well with you and that you shall greatly increase as YHWH God of your fathers promised to you. (It is) a land flowing with milk and honey.⁴⁷

⁴ Hear,⁴⁸ O Israel, YHWH our⁴⁹ God YHWH (is) one. ⁵ Love YHWH your God with all your heart⁵⁰ and with all your soul and with all your strength.⁵¹

⁴⁶ 'This commandment' in the singular is unexpected, as it belongs to a series of plural references. This can be solved by considering the second two references as appositional to the singular (so McConville, 2002:140), or, as Weinfeld (1991:326-7) does, by considering **וְהַצְוִיּוֹת** to refer to a body of instruction distinct from the 'prescriptions and judgements'. See discussion in the comment section.

⁴⁷ This verse is difficult. The LXX renders the latter part of this verse, 'καθαπερ ἐλάλησεν κυριος ὁ θεος των πατερων σου δουναι σοι γην ρεουσαν γαλα και μελι' ('as the Lord the God of your fathers promised to give to you a land flowing with milk and honey'). The addition of 'to give' enables the final clause to be understood as the content of the promise, but it makes the conjunction somewhat meaningless (cf. Weinfeld, 1991:322). Driver (1895:89) expects a preposition 'in' to connect this clause to the preceding sentence, but seeing as there is none, supposes that it is a misplaced sentence, or that certain words have dropped out. Weinfeld (1991:322) prefers the view, pace Driver, that this is an accusative of place, and that the preposition need not be added. He also notes the possibility that the final clause resumes the comment about land from verse 1. McConville (2002:138) argues for either adding the preposition or following Weinfeld in reading it as an accusative of place.

Adding the preposition 'in' is consistent with the theology of the Promised Land for which this thesis argues, but according to my reading, this final clause may rather function as a general, summative declaration of God's promises of prosperity, rather than being specifically related to the prior sentence (such that a preposition should be expected). Similarly, Christensen (2001:136) suggests that this seemingly out-of-place clause should be viewed as a nominal sentence, and so preceded by 'It is'. Christensen's structural analysis (discussed below) sees this clause as the end of a structural unit, he sees Deuteronomy as a whole as a rhythmic text intended for performance (2001:lxix), and this clause immediately follows a command to 'Hear O Israel' (and precedes the next one); therefore this would be an appropriate place to insert a summative, refrain-like line.

⁴⁸ For discussion on changes from singular to plural, see page 89.

⁴⁹ This verse can be understood in a number of ways, but we will discuss this in the exegesis section. It is my opinion that the verse intends some polyvalence, and so in translation I have aimed at a similar degree of openness.

⁵⁰ "'Heart" connotes mind' (Weinfeld, 1991:338). It is linked to 'understanding' in Hebrew thinking.

⁵¹ Weinfeld (1991:332) points out that 'strength' often refers to wealth or property, both in Hebrew and in the Greek words used in the LXX. The Aramaic Targum Onqelos paraphrases this verse using a word that specifically refers to property, and Targums Pseudo-Jonathan and Neofiti use a word specifically meaning 'money'.

⁶ And let these words that I am commanding you today be upon your heart. ⁷ Teach them diligently⁵² to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you go on the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ Bind them as a sign upon your hand and let them be as frontlets⁵³ between your eyes. ⁹ And write them upon doorposts of your house and on your gates.

¹⁰ And when it happens that YHWH your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers Abram, Isaac and Jacob to give to you – cities great and good that you did not build, ¹¹ houses full of all good (things) that you did not fill, and wells having been dug that you did not dig, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant – and you eat and are satisfied, ¹² watch yourself lest you forget YHWH who brought you out from the land of Egypt from the house of slaves. ¹³ It is YHWH your God that you shall fear and him you shall serve and in his name shall you swear. ¹⁴ You shall not go after other gods from the gods of the nations that surround you – ¹⁵ for YHWH your God is a jealous God in your midst – lest it kindles the wrath of YHWH your God against you and he destroys you from upon the face of the land.

¹⁶ You shall not test YHWH your God as you tested (Him) in Massah. ¹⁷ You shall certainly (or ‘be exceedingly careful to’) keep the commandments of YHWH your God and his testimonies and prescriptions that he commanded you. ¹⁸ You shall do the straight and the good in the eyes of YHWH so that it may go well with you and you may go and take possession of the good land that YHWH swore to your fathers; ¹⁹ to cast out⁵⁴ all your enemies from before you as YHWH promised. ²⁰ Because your son shall ask in time to come saying, ‘Why the testimonies and prescriptions and judgements that YHWH our God commanded you?’ ²¹ And you shall say to your son, ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt and YHWH brought us out from Egypt with a mighty hand; ²² And YHWH gave signs and wonders great and grave upon Egypt and Pharaoh and all his house before our eyes; ²³ And we were brought out from there in order to bring us in, to give to us the land that he swore to our fathers. ²⁴ And YHWH commanded us to do all these prescriptions, (in order) to fear YHWH our God for good⁵⁵ to us all the days,⁵⁶ to keep us alive as (we are) today. ²⁵ And righteousness⁵⁷ will be to us if we are careful to keep all of this commandment before the face of YHWH our God as he commanded us.’

⁵² שָׁנַן might be variously translated. It commonly means ‘to sharpen’; in its *Piel* form it may also refer to incisive teaching, and in this context, many translators opt for a sense of diligent teaching or ‘impressing’. Each option is imperfect – for example, diligence seems too weak and stresses the persistence of the teacher rather than the ‘sharpening’ effect of the teaching – but not much is at stake. ‘Teach diligently’ has been retained in continuity with many modern translations.

⁵³ This is a rare word about which there is much discussion (see for example Weinfeld, 1991:333f). As the various possibilities for translation have no bearing upon the subject of this thesis, we will not discuss it further.

⁵⁴ Weinfeld (1991:347) notes that the word for casting out is uncommon, appearing also in 9:4 and Joshua 23:5 in connection with the Canaanites. The author seems intentionally to be avoiding the more common verb גָּרַע.

⁵⁵ McConville (2002:138) notes that לְטוֹב could also be read as an infinitive construct that he translates as, ‘in order that we might have well-being’.

⁵⁶ Driver identifies what is literally ‘all the days’ as an expression, either functioning adverbially to mean ‘continually’ or to mean ‘for ever’ (1895:77). McConville (2002:137) includes לְחַיֵּינוּ within this phrase, rendering it, ‘all the days of our lives’.

⁵⁷ Weinfeld (1991:349) argues that וְצִדְקָה can mean a number of things, referring ‘both to moral righteousness and legal innocence.’ By extension it can refer to merit, and this is the translation that he prefers in this case: ‘it will be to our merit’. I prefer something closer to the rendering of McConville (2002:137), ‘We shall be held righteous’, as I will argue.

3.3 EXEGESIS

Deuteronomy contains speeches that purport to have been preached by Moses to the Israelites shortly before they entered the Promised Land; these speeches are bookended by short narrative sections. Chapter 6 directly follows Moses' restatement of the Decalogue, and it is part of a larger section of general discussion of the covenant law that extends until the end of chapter 11.

We will begin exegesis of this passage with a preliminary examination of its contents.

3.3.1 Preliminary analysis

[1]

Verse 1 begins with the words, 'And this is the commandment.' The pronoun 'this' is ambiguous, as it may direct the reader back to a commandment already given, or look ahead to one to be given shortly. Thus it may refer to the Decalogue from the previous chapter or to the body of laws that follows (or perhaps both if one considers the body of laws to be an elaboration upon the Ten Commandments). It is important therefore to establish what is meant by 'commandment'.

The first puzzle is that 'commandment' appears in the singular, and is followed by 'prescriptions and judgements' both in the plural. It is not clear how these three are related. Weinfeld (1991:326-7) accounts for this with Dillman's suggestion that *הַמִּצְוָה* represents an idea borrowed from treaty documents, and refers to the suzerain's demand for loyalty. This would indicate that the thing that is to be passed on is the description of fidelity by which the treaty relationship is to be maintained.

He notes that 'commandment' is not used in 12:1 when the laws themselves begin, and so reasons that it is a technical term referring 'to the basic demand for loyalty that is actually expounded in 6:4-11:30'. Thus he regards it as distinguishable from the 'prescriptions and judgements' that complete the triad.

The argument that 'commandment' does not appear in 12:1 is not especially persuasive, as there is no reason that the author is obliged to mention it; in fact, each of the three main interpretations of the triad can account easily for its absence there.⁵⁸

The syntax of 6:1 (the absence of a *ו* conjunction before 'prescriptions') suggests that the appositional relationship is to be preferred. However, repetitions of this triad elsewhere seem to

⁵⁸ If the singular is in apposition to the two plurals, then either half of the equation can do duty; similarly, if the terms are synonymous, then any of them may appear or not appear without an intended change in meaning.

treat the three as distinct. For example, in 7:11 each is introduced with the accusative-case marker and conjunction, forming a list of direct objects, rather than an appositional relationship. McConville (2002:133) points out that the Samaritan Pentateuch renders all of these constructions in apposition, and he argues that this is the best solution. A key argument for him is the way that the singular, ‘commandment,’ is used in passages such as 8:1:

‘The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do...’ (ESV)

Its connection with ‘today’ convinces McConville that Moses is referring to the whole body of teaching being delivered in Moses’ final address, rather than merely the Decalogue, for example. The singular form appears to stand for the whole body of commands.

Furthermore, 6:2 uses the word ‘commandments’ (וּמִצְוֹתָיו) along with ‘prescriptions’, which either means that only the singular has the technical sense for which Weinfeld argues, or that the words are in fact interchangeable.

Thus I will tentatively side with McConville in regarding the relationship as appositional, and thus referring to the whole body of instruction.

However, the word seems to be able to do double duty. It seems able to refer more particularly to the Decalogue as the summary overview of the covenant (see comment on verse 3), as well as to the whole body of Deuteronomy’s covenant law. ‘This commandment’ in 6:1 seems to utilise this duality in order to act as a hinge between the Decalogue of chapter 5 and the remaining collection of laws (which seem to be thought of as expansions upon and applications of the Decalogue).

‘In the land that you are crossing over there to possess.’ The commandments that Moses expounds are intended to govern life in the land. That the law code particularly governs life within its borders indicates that there is a special relationship with the land; much as man received commands about life in Eden, so also YHWH lays the limits within the place that He has prepared.

There is continuity with the laws already given in Exodus, but expansion and revision too. This heightens the sense that they are entering into a new phase of relationship with YHWH.

[2]

Verse 2 responds to verse 1 with a purpose clause stressing that the teaching of the law has as its goal the *fear of YHWH*, which in turn leads to obedience. Weinfeld (1991:325) refers back to 5:26 in which the fear of YHWH is related to the hearts of the people. He translates it as,

‘Oh, that this their heart was such that they would fear me... all the days, that they may fare well and their children forever.’

It’s location on the heart is of a piece with the demands of covenant loyalty that occupy these chapters, in this case, expressing the wish that His people should have an inward desire for this covenant relationship.

Christensen (2001:198,203-4) identifies 10:12-13 as the *locus classicus* for the fear of YHWH in Deuteronomy. He translates this text as follows:

‘And now, O Israel, what does YHWH your God ask of you but to fear YHWH your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your being, to keep the commandments of YHWH, and His statutes, that I command you today, that it might be well with you.’

He argues that the fear of the Lord is expanded upon by means of poetic parallelism. It is in parallel with ‘to walk in all His ways’, and ‘to love Him and to serve YHWH your God’. Furthermore, ‘to love’, he says, is at the structural centre of this construction. It reiterates much of the Great Commandment of chapter 6, but it makes it clearer that fear is much more of a positive relational term than it may superficially appear.

Fear of YHWH, therefore, connotes inward love of God and wilful trust in and obedience to Him. In Israel, this fear is predominantly associated with ‘the positive element in the God-Man relationship’, that is, ‘quiet confidence in the manifest God’ (Eichrodt, 1967:273). However, it is not just to be regarded as an idiosyncratic synonym for love. ‘Fear’ is an appropriate idea because, while it is not the ideal term to capture the emotional quality of the relationship (‘love’ is better for that purpose), it is descriptive of the *order* of the relationship. Eichrodt (1967:268f) adds that ‘fear’ expresses the paradox of *personal* relationship that includes the perception of *separation*. He says,

‘The predominant trait in the personal relationship of Man with God in the Old Testament is given linguistic expression in the habit of describing the whole religious relationship as the fear of God... usage that persists with remarkable regularity from the earliest to latest times. There can be no doubt that this shows the sense of gap between God and Man to be the dominant element in Old Testament piety.’

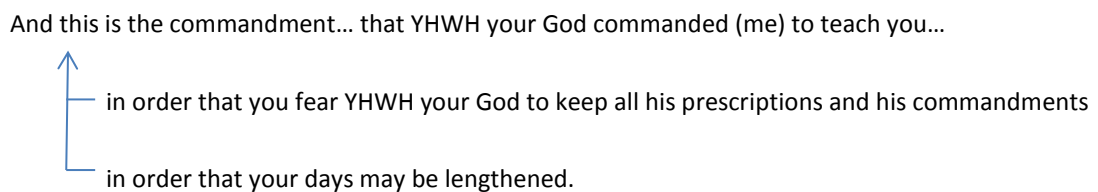
He clarifies that ‘religious fear’ is not merely ‘a naked feeling of terror’, but an ambivalent feeling that incorporates attraction and anxiety, awe and trust. This is not a relationship of equals. God may not be distant, but He remains completely ‘other’ with respect to His people and He remains the Creator and the liberator with the mighty arm, and thus deepest reverence is an appropriate state of being. Fear also defines clearly the position of subordination that we have as ‘vassals’, and the

rightness of loyal obedience that is required in response. In continuity with defeated vassals under a treaty, fear of YHWH is demonstrated by keeping all His prescriptions and commands.

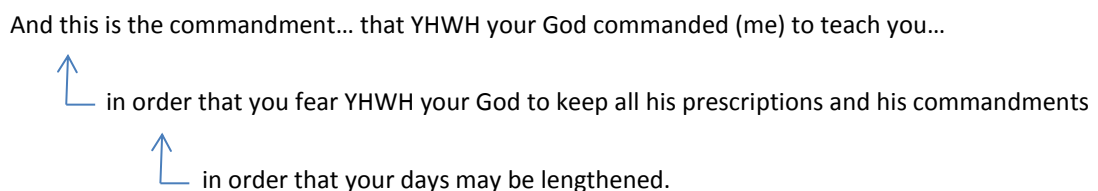
'Keep all his prescriptions ... you and your son, and your son's son.' Verse 2 ends with a combination of three phrases that have to do with the passing of time. The first is the mention of three generations in the family line, all of whom are to watchfully keep YHWH's commands. The intent is clearly to advocate the passing on of these traditions, the preservation of the covenant. Watchfully keeping the commandments includes the responsibility to *see them kept* in perpetuity.

'All days of your life.' The second time phrase relates to the individual's life-long commitment. Keeping YHWH's commandments demands unflagging perseverance.

'In order that your days may be lengthened.' The third time phrase is also the second consequence clause in the verse. It is possible to understand the relationship of the consequence clauses in two ways. They may both be related to the main sentence as purposes but not to each other, as follows:



However, the second consequence could also be understood as a result of the first, as follows:



The first structure is less likely, as this verse reworks a pattern already established and reiterated in this section, namely that blessing is the result of obedience. Seeing that the second structure maintains that pattern, it is to be preferred.

As a result clause, this teaches that total commitment 'all of your days' results in the blessing of longevity from YHWH. Although the form of this blessing is concerned with length of life, it is the lengthening of the *good life* that is in view, rather than mere longevity. The extension of a life of misery would be more curse than blessing, and so long life should be understood as the opposite of a life cut short, that is, a life deprived of all the good that it promised. Thus this blessing is representative of a comprehensively good state of existence.

[3]

Verse 3 has the feel of a summation; it begins with the words, 'And hear O Israel', contains a general appeal for obedience and resultant promise of blessing, and it ends with a key phrase – about the land flowing with milk and honey – that seems divorced from the rest of the sentence.

The opening exhortation to hear has already become a refrain in Deuteronomy, even before its most famous iteration in 6:4. It occurs first in 4:1, in which Moses announces that he will shortly set before them the decrees and laws that will govern life in the land. He repeats it in 5:1 to say that he will now begin setting forth the laws, and he repeats it again in 6:3 to announce that he is giving (or has given) the laws that he was commanded to teach (6:1). In other words, the triad of exhortations to hear prepare the people for the recitation of the Decalogue, introduce the Decalogue, and signal the end of its narration. So, 6:3 serves as a concluding verse to the pronouncement of the Decalogue, and the three-fold repetition of the exhortation serves to circumscribe this key body of covenant stipulations, marking them out as special.

The command itself ('Hear!') seems not to be merely a rhetorical device that aims at calling the audience to attention, should any of them have drifted off. Here in verse 3 the command to hear is coupled also with the command to do. Moses is not saying 'Pay attention,' he's saying 'Listen to YHWH! Do what He says!'

This is probably akin to the hearing in Jesus' phrase, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear!'⁵⁹

'That it shall go well with you.' Verse 3 provides a summary promise of comprehensive goodness, a blessing that is made dependent upon Israel's commitment to 'hear and be watchful to do'. Trust and obedience are necessary characteristics of the divine-human relationship in which God's blessing may be enjoyed. Behaving in a rightly ordered way results in the good life.

The relationship between obedience and blessing seems linear in this text, such that doing right will lead to prospering. This could legitimately be used to support the belief that one merits good things mechanically by behaving well, but it is not an interpretation that this text demands. It can also be understood to be saying that God's favour and His intention to prosper His people for their good is *available no other way* than via a flourishing relationship with Him.

⁵⁹ Similarly, in Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus insists that wisdom is hearing him and putting his words into practice. In such a context it is clear that the command to hear involves ingesting ideas in a receptive manner, not letting words fall to the ground, as the expression goes.

'A land flowing with milk and honey.' The final statement of this section is difficult to translate, as it is grammatically disconnected from the rest of the sentence (see translation footnotes above). As I've argued, the clause seems to me to be intentionally disconnected and not to require reconnection to the prior sentence. Christensen (2001:lxix) makes a case that the book as a whole is intended for vocal performance, and thus we ought to expect the appearance of refrains and other key phrases. Even if it is not a musical device, it is an emphatic declaration of the goodness of the promises that can appropriately stand on its own.

Merrill (1994:161) sees the description of the land as 'flowing with milk and honey' as a hyperbolic description of the prosperity of the land. Milk as an agricultural product stands for productiveness of human labour in the land, and honey represents the land's natural fruitfulness.⁶⁰ Certainly both connote richness and sweetness, luxury that overflows in its abundance.

If this part of the verse is a nominal sentence, or seen as a summative exclamation, then the land plays an interesting role here. As a summary of the preceding section, this declaration about the land seems to incorporate within it all the individual blessings already mentioned in this section (lengthening of days, life 'going well', greatly increasing). In other words, the prospering land stands symbolically for the whole body of blessing that God intends to give. This puts the land in a significant relationship to blessing.

If the other popular means of dealing with this difficult syntax is to be followed, the verse says, 'that it shall go well with you, and that you shall greatly increase... in a land flowing with milk and honey.' Even in this rendering, the land remains in an important position: it overtly supports the idea that blessing is to be sought within the borders of Canaan.

Either way you translate it, it makes a strong case for the land as the essential environment of blessing. Whether it's saying that God intends to make Israel increase *in* the land or that the connection of land and blessing is so tight that the land is able to stand symbolically for the whole, the converse seems also to be true: outside the land there *isn't* the promise of milk and honey. The verse seems to imply that, if outside the land, Israel would have been outside the environment in which the promises of blessing were intended to operate.

⁶⁰ Keown *et al* (1995:156) raise the possibility that the 'honey' is a molasses-like product made from grapes, which if this is the case would communicate that there is overflowing bounty from both herds and the cultivation of crops. I should think that the intention of the imagery is to communicate the richness of the produce (milk and honey are luxury items) and the goodness and abundance of the land. It would seem more effective for the image to communicate natural produce in some way rather than agricultural only, and thus in the absence of clear evidence one way or another I would favour not adopting Keown's suggestion.

With this grand declaration of the goodness of God's land of promise, the section draws to a close. The following section begins more detailed reflections upon the Decalogue, particularly the commands to loyally love YHWH alone, and to worship Him in holiness.

[4]

Verse 4 is commonly known as the *Shema*, a creedal statement said daily by pious Jews. Its form in Hebrew is again a source of puzzlement for translators. There are at least five popular ways of translating this phrase:⁶¹

1. YHWH our God, (even) YHWH, is one
2. YHWH is our God, YHWH is one
3. YHWH is our God, YHWH alone
4. YHWH our God is one YHWH
5. YHWH our God, YHWH is one

Driver (1895:89) only lists the first four options, and argues that option 3 is not to be preferred because it 'assigns a dubious sense to **יְהוָה**'. He further argues that options 1, 2, and 4 do not differ materially in meaning, but can see no reason for the resumption of the subject YHWH in the first two. He thus regards option 4 as the most probable rendering.

Merrill (1994:162) prefers the second option, whereas Christensen (2001:141) prefers the third.

Weinfeld (1991:332, 337) points out that 'Is one YHWH' is a noun clause without a verb or a resumptive pronoun, and that the Nash papyrus has '*hu*' appended to the end of this clause and the LXX renders it with the 'to be' verb. Both of these facts favour a translation as 'YHWH, he is one'. Oddly, his own translation of the chapter renders it in line with the fourth option: 'He is one YHWH'.

In his full discussion of the verse, he does not consider the first option, but rejects 2 and 3 on the grounds that **יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ** never appears in Deuteronomy as subject and predicate, but only appositionally. He also rejects the fifth translation because of the awkward discontinuation of the first subject, and thus prefers option 4, but with the caveat that unity *and* aloneness should be

⁶¹ Christensen (2001:142) adds a sixth from Dahood: 'Obey, Israel, YHWH. YHWH our God is the Unique.' This requires the initial imperative to take YHWH as object. This is an attractive suggestion for the reason explained in the previous verse: The command to hear is not a rhetorical device; it is something that the receivers of Moses' words are being asked to do in relation to God's commands. In other words, it implies the phrase 'Hear YHWH!' The reason why I would not advocate taking YHWH as object of the command in this verse is that 4:1 and 5:1 have taken 'the commands and decrees' as object, because they relate to paying careful attention to the Decalogue and serve to bracket that material. Every other occurrence of 'Hear, O Israel' in Deuteronomy takes no object at all. Even though the explanation is able to account for the double use of 'YHWH', I would consider more likely that 'hear' functions as the remaining uses in the book do, and thus ought to stand as a general call to receptiveness to YHWH's command and take no object.

regarded as connotations of ‘one’ in this instance. He points out that **אֶחָד** normally means ‘one’, but is used to mean ‘alone’ in at least 1Chronicles 29:1.

Against the fourth option, Miller (1990:99) echoes what was also my first instinct, saying that ‘Deuteronomy is concerned with the sole worship of the Lord, not multiple manifestations of Israel’s God’. In other words, there is no evidence in Deuteronomy that there is belief in more than one YHWH, and so no need to assert the contrary. However, Merrill (1994:163) points out that ‘He is one YHWH’ should be understood as a comment about the *self-consistency* of YHWH: He is not ambivalent, but is one rather who single-mindedly pursues a consistent goal for Creation. While this makes it a more reasonable option, it still doesn’t make strong sense within a context otherwise concerned with the need to express exclusive fidelity to Him.

Christensen (2001:142) renders his translation to reflect the third option, but argues that there is a ‘measure of truth’ in each rendering. I find Weinfeld’s critique of option 3 (see above) convincing, and so I would avoid splitting ‘YHWH our God’ into subject and predicate. However, I agree with Christensen’s sentiment that there is value in the multiplication of meanings. The lack of clarity in this construction may well be intentionally multivalent, inviting His people to understand His oneness broadly. Miller (1990:101) corroborates this argument with Mark 12:32 in which,

‘both meanings - the Lord is one and besides the Lord there is no other - are held together in the Great Commandment pericope, giving canonical support to the claim that both meanings may be understood as legitimate interpretations of the text.’

Pace Weinfeld, I favour the fifth option (‘Hear, O Israel, YHWH your God, YHWH is one’), even though there is ‘awkward discontinuation’ of the first subject. I favour this option because it retains the openness of the Hebrew version, whereas all the others limit the polyvalency by the addition of the verb or more specific interpretations of **אֶחָד**. Furthermore, the ‘awkward’ repetition of the subject seems to me to be functioning emphatically, doubly emphasising that it is *YHWH* who is one. This emphasis is fitting in a section that urges the people not to stray from exclusive, orderly worship of YHWH.

In terms of the meaning of this verse, we have already noted that these verses follow the restatement of the Decalogue, which is identified as the substance of (or at least the basis of) the ‘commandments and decrees’ that Israel must keep. Moses’ additional lawgiving seems to be

reflections upon and application of the Decalogue.⁶² Furthermore, the focus of the subsequent material in this unit is upon remembering YHWH, worshipping Him alone, and taking extreme measures to avoid idolatry.

It seems probable, then, that this key exhortation at the head of this section aims primarily to encourage obedience to the first two commandments, exhorting them to loyalty to YHWH and exclusive worship. Therefore, the main implications of the *Shema* are that YHWH is one God, He is God alone, and He is not to be worshipped as the surrounding nations worship their many gods.

[5]

Verse 5 is famous for Christians as the verse that Jesus identified as first among the commandments. If the initial line of the *Shema* can be thought of as a creedal statement outlining something of Israel's doctrine of God, this verse outlines the appropriate human response to that doctrine. If YHWH is one God and God alone, Israel ought to give love in return.

As noted above, Christensen has argued on the basis of parallelism in chapter 10 that love of YHWH is strongly related to the fear of YHWH, and that both of these should be understood as a call to covenant loyalty: love belongs to the description of the proper order of relationship called into being by the covenant.

The concept of love for YHWH is not exclusive to Deuteronomy. It appears also in Exodus 20:6 (in which it plays an important role in the Decalogue); Joshua 22:5, 23:11; Judges 5:31; 1Kings 3:3; and Psalms 31:24, 97:10, and 145:20 (Weinfeld, 1991:338). Through a range of biblical eras and across genres, this idea that obedience is to be combined with love reappears. This is important, because while the demand for 'love' can be found in vassal-treaty documents, in which the superior party calls for the 'love' of the conquered vassal as a pledge of loyalty (Christensen, 2001:143), this terminology in scripture is used outside of Deuteronomy and thus outside of material that is consciously mimicking treaty documents. Thus it is likely that biblical usage intends a more relational quality. 'Love' is a word that often connotes deep feeling and close relationship, and it is probable that there is an element of this in the biblical usage. The ideal Israelite is not loyal and obedient to the law out of a sense of duty, or of fear of punishment, or of greed for reward. Loyalty and obedience are meant to be part of a deeper relationship.

⁶² Weinfeld (1991:328) makes a similar argument for the relationship of chapter 6 to the Decalogue: '[The Shema] actually constitutes a theoretical restatement of the first two commandments of the Decalogue: the unity of God corresponds to the first commandment, while the denial of all other divinities corresponds to the second.'

Weinfeld (1991:338) says that ‘heart’ connotes ‘mind’, and indeed the LXX translates this verse using the word διανοια (‘mind’). Clearly, loving YHWH ‘with all your heart’ in biblical usage means something quite different than that phrase in modern usage. While we would use the idiom to express sincere love, or perhaps deep emotion, this would not have been an Israelite’s association. As Merrill (1994:167) points out:

‘In the psychology of the Old Testament the heart is not the centre of emotional life and response but the seat of the intellect or rational side of humankind. To “be upon the heart” is to be in one’s constant, conscious reflection.’

Deuteronomy is identifying thought and the will as a realm from which love and loyalty must flow, and over which YHWH must have full reign. The addition of ‘soul’ and ‘strength’ serves to emphasise the totality of this demand for love and obedience over all of life, particularly man’s inner life.

The targums have interesting interpretations of ‘strength’. Weinfeld (1991:332) claims that while the LXX retains the focus on the inner man, translating it as ‘strength and force’, some Aramaic targums translate using words that specifically mean ‘property’ or ‘wealth’. This is significant for our study because of what it means for the ethics of prosperity. It is not significant because ‘property’ and ‘wealth’ can be confirmed as more accurate renderings of the sentiment behind the Hebrew. It is significant as a ‘consciousness raiser’; it causes us to remember that loving God ‘with our all’ cannot remain in the abstract, but surely must include our material selves and our possessions too. Even if loving God with heart, soul, and strength has intentionally focused on the inner person, it has done so in order to ensure that no area has been left out. The picture is meant to appear total. It *at least* includes thoughts about possessions and our decisions about spending as well. Israel had a responsibility to love God with their prosperity.

[6]

‘Let these words that I am commanding you today be upon your heart.’ There is ambiguity in the reference to ‘these words’; it may mean all that Moses says in the book, or a discrete body of commands, or specifically the Decalogue. Weinfeld (1991:340) points out that 11:18-20 is a parallel passage to this one, and in that text Moses speaks of ‘these words *of mine*’, which increases the likelihood that he means the whole body of commands delivered in the book.

The more important matter is the location of ‘these words’, namely ‘on the heart’. Not only love of God but also obedience to the law are to be matters of the heart, not formal observance. This bolsters the idea that the point of the law is not mere compliance, but relationship. Obedience to God is something that should spring from inner desire, the will to love.

[7-9]

Verses 7-9 describe the meaning and extent of love for God's commands. The intent of this passage is to emphasise that loving the law means being saturated with it in all areas of life.

Similarly to the blessings themselves or the inheritance of land, the commandments must be passed down to the next generation; more than passed down, they must be deeply ingrained in the lives of Israel's generations. Merrill (1994:167) identifies the *Piel* verb (וְשִׁנְנֵתָם) as referring to the task of the stone engraver, and indicates that this is meant to convey the sense of hard labour and painstaking care. The text also employs merism, the use of either pole to encompass everything in between: whether one is at home or travelling, standing or lying down – that is, in every circumstance – one should be talking about the commandments (Merrill, 1994:167). Symbolism is used too: they are to be tied to the hands (governing behaviour) and to the forehead (governing the thoughts, the eyes, the mouth); they are to be written on doorposts (governing the home) and on gates (governing the comings and goings).

This demand on Israel's behaviour is comprehensive; there is nowhere in which the Israelite is exempt from this covenant, which is perhaps an oppressive thought for the rebel, but a clear picture of love for God's covenant for the one in relationship with YHWH.

Although having symbolic value, passages of the law came to be worn as amulets in literal observance of this passage. Wearing of these phylacteries unfortunately, at times, 'caused people to lose sight of the remarkable vision of an internalised covenant suggested in vv5-7' (Christensen, 2001:143).

[10-11]

Verses 10-11 emphasise the goodness of what is to be inherited, and the grace by which it is to be received. Prosperity language features strongly to entrench the idea of its goodness: the land is great (גְּדֹלָתָהּ) and good (וְטוֹבָתָהּ); there are already houses and they are full of all good things (כָּל־טוֹב); there are wells, vineyards, and olive groves, which speaks of the fertility and plenty of the land; and all of these result in eating and being satisfied (וְשָׂבַעְתָּ). This is the urban equivalent of the Garden of Eden. Just as God prepared the garden and placed man within it, He has prepared the Promised Land so that it is tamed and cultivated and yielding good and plenty.⁶³

⁶³ This is even more evident in Deuteronomy 11 – a related text – in which the land is described, in contrast to humanly cultivated land, as a land that God Himself tends (11:10-12). So, even though the allusion is not overt, in both texts God is a gardener preparing a place for His people.

The emphasis upon grace is entrenched by means of the repetition of Israel's lack of a role in bringing about these good conditions. Moses says, 'You did not build... you did not fill... you did not dig... you did not plant'. Verse 10 contrasts Israel's role with God's role as giver and fulfiller of promise. The land is undeserved, unmerited, received as a gift.

So again we see that the gift of prosperity is characteristic of the fruits that attend relationship with God (the restoration of 'Eden'), but we see also that Israel did not receive these benefits on a cause-and-effect basis. The gift of prosperity is because of God's love and promises, not because people are deserving or more valuable than those bereft of prosperity (it was the wicked *Canaanites* after all who earned their prosperity, and it was merely handed over to the undeserving Israelites).

[12]

The emphasis on the goodness of the gift and the grace of the Giver stands in contrast to an associated warning in verse 12, which adds another important dimension to the dynamics of prosperity, that is, the power of prosperity to corrupt. As Christensen says:

'The focus of attention here [6:10-12] is on the realisation that the material wealth the people are about to possess is a gift from God. The implicit warning is clear: the people are to guard against the danger of taking on the attitude of self-sufficiency that prosperity so often brings.' (2001:147)

The latter part of this section warns of a consequence of prosperity: it has the power to corrupt the divine-human relationship. The text urges Israel to 'watch' (וַשְׂמֹר) lest they forget YHWH. This is the *Niphal* form, which refers particularly to being on one's guard or being watchful, but Israel are to keep watch over themselves, taking stock of the attitudes of their hearts. Forgetting God here is the opposite of loving Him with their heart, soul, and strength.

In verse 12, God is identified specifically as the One who brought Israel 'out from the land of Egypt from the house of slaves'. This reference serves two purposes: firstly, it reminds Israel of God's covenant position, calling to mind His status as redeemer-king, father, God, initiator of covenant. Secondly, it reminds Israel of *their* status. It calls to mind their original status as slaves. When enjoying wealth and freedom, they should remember that without God's intervention, they would still be labourers of a harsh master.

Just as the people are about to enter the urban equivalent of Eden, this again might be seen as an urban equivalent of themes from the Creation narratives in Genesis, this time running parallel to man's Creation-status as dust. Abraham acknowledges that 'dust' is a reminder of man's lowly position in Genesis 18:27 (' Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to

speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes,” NIV),⁶⁴ and slavery likewise seems to be a reminder to this nation that they have no claim to inherent value.

Both of these status elements ought to enable Israel to remember their position within the covenant relationship, and they ought to be a protection against the Adam-like rebellion of forgetfulness. They are intended to help Israel connect enjoyment of the gift with love of the Giver.

The warning in this text introduces a key idea with respect to the dynamics of prosperity. We have already noted on a number of occasions that prosperity is not the direct result of obedience or merit of any other kind. However, this text tells us that prosperity may in fact cause God’s people to stray from relationship with Him. Eating and being satisfied may result in forgetting YHWH.

[13]

Verse 13 provides a link between ‘forgetfulness’ in verse 12 and outright idolatry in verse 14. Moses has already promoted willing fear of YHWH as a relational ideal, and here again he exhorts them to fear Him and serve Him and stand under the banner of His name.

This verse is important, because while it is easier to understand idols as competition for the fear of YHWH, it is not intuitive to regard either pleasure or sufficiency – or indeed forgetfulness – as doing so. And yet verse 13 draws the forgetfulness of prosperity into the order of idolatry.

The connection of forgetfulness with the prosperity of the land is not made clear here, but there are two later passages that help to clarify what is meant.

Firstly, as Tigay (1996:80) says, wealth produces an attitude of self-sufficiency because of the reason given in 8:17, ‘My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me’. Forgetfulness means the failure to recognise that God is the source of prosperity, and attributing it to oneself is to usurp His position.

The second clarifying text, Deuteronomy 11, repeats a number of elements of chapter 6, including a description in even greater detail of the bounty of the land, and the associated warning to ‘watch yourself’. Moses says,

‘Take care (or ‘watch yourself’: **הִשָּׁמְרִי**) lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them.’ (11:16 ESV)

⁶⁴ See also Psalm 103:13-14.

It is significant that this verse repeats the same command ('take care') but in place of 'forgetting the Lord' it inserts 'deceit of the heart and idolatry'. Forgetting the Lord is not merely disregard for Him; it seems to be interchangeable with idolatry. Perhaps it means to repeat the sentiment of 8:17, in which the idolatry is making the self into the provider in the place of YHWH. But perhaps the idolatry may be the worship of prosperity itself. The love of wealth for its own sake has the power to deceive and to usurp the position that God ought to occupy in the heart.

Thus Israel may begin to forget the place that YHWH occupies, forget the true source of prosperity, forget why the relationship with God is important. Prosperity may begin to be enjoyed for its own sake, dissociated from its place within covenant relationship.

Verse 13 commands Israel to take oaths only in the name of YHWH. To do so is an expression of loyalty, whereas using the names of other gods would be an act of betrayal; such oaths recognise that He alone is 'the arbitrating power in all man's dealings' (Weinfeld, 1991:345). The love of money erodes that loyalty and promotes misplaced confidence, warped views of power.

Thus the danger in prosperity is not a small one. Prosperity is a good gift from God, pleasing to the eye and good for attaining wisdom, one might say. But once the eye falls from the Giver and onto the gift, our worship becomes confused and misdirected also, and like Adam we take hold of the fruit of rebellion.

[14-15]

After this veiled reference to the possibility of straying from the loyalty expressed in the *Shema*, Verse 14 directly warns against 'going after' and serving other gods.⁶⁵ It ends with a warning of destruction from the face of the land, a severe threat of violent reversal of the Conquest.

What this section means for the dynamics of prosperity is that not only is there no direct correlation between faithfulness and prospering, but the opposite may also be true. Prosperity in combination with a heart prone to straying can be a test. So enjoyment of prosperity can be a catalyst that produces rebellion and unbelief.

Ironically, 6:3 described prosperity as a result of obedience to the commandments, whereas here it warns that prosperity can be the *cause* of the breaking of the chief of the commandments of the Decalogue. Disobedience may not be a *necessary* result of prosperity, but it is clearly a danger.

⁶⁵ To 'go after' other gods is a characteristic phrase in Deuteronomy. It means 'to follow loyally' (Weinfeld, 1991:345) and often appears in combination with 'to serve' (see also 8:19; 11:28; 13:2-4; 28:14).

Thus, when Deuteronomy urges Israel not to let prosperity cause them to forget God, it effectively demonstrates that prosperity is a dangerous gift as long as the recipients are prone to sin. Prosperity can only be a good gift when it is found within the sphere of properly ordered relationship with YHWH. If sin corrupts that relationship, prosperity can be a curse.

There is clearly a sense in which prosperity and sinful humanity are incompatible, or at least uneasy bedfellows. If the promises of prosperity are to be fully enjoyed, sin needs to be removed from the human heart.

[16]

The mention of testing at Massah is on one level unexpected. In that event, Israel had accused God of leading them into the desert in order to let them die of thirst, and they challenged Him to intervene decisively to provide water in the desert. In Deuteronomy 6, this recollection follows a warning associated with *abundance* in the land. This contrast is likely meant to indicate that the same attitude of rebellion may be precipitated by quite different circumstances. Forgetting God and His promises can be brought on by hardship, in which one doubts God's ability to provide, or by plenty, in which one forgets that God is the one who *has* provided. Tigay (1996:81) identifies further relevance to the present passage:

'The Lord's presence among a people or within a land refers to His providential control of events affecting them. The people saw their demand as a test of God's control of conditions in the desert, specifically His ability to supply water. Tests of that sort imply a lack of confidence in God's ability... This reasoning is spelled out in Psalms 78 and 106, which indicate that testing God is a consequence of forgetting His past marvels, especially those that took place during the Exodus. For this reason, the present paragraph is a natural sequel to verses 10-15, which warn against forgetting God who brought Israel out of Egypt, and a natural introduction to verses 20-25, which urge that children be taught about the Exodus.'

Thus there are additional connections here to the role of the Exodus in the thought-life of Israel. They need to remember the Exodus because they will thereby recall the kind of relationship that they are intended to enjoy with YHWH, and they will remember His promises.

The related tests of hardship and wealth have an interesting parallel in the geography of the ancient world. Ranier Kessler's (2008:15-18) examination of Israel's social history makes a thought-provoking observation in this regard that suggests a more general spiritual principle. He claims that one of the reasons that Canaan developed more slowly than territories such as Egypt is *because of* the natural fertility of Canaan. It seems counter-intuitive, but he argues that hardship in Egypt forced people to congregate in the most hospitable areas and to have to co-operate in order to make use of the

meagre resources most effectively. This in turn provided the means and motivation for invention and technological and cultural advance. By contrast, the relative prosperity of Canaan meant that subsistence could be achieved much more easily, which meant that people could live reasonably independently of each other. The absence of hardship and need meant that there was little necessity for progress. As such, Canaan remained relatively static and disorganised.

This illustrates how prosperity might work in the heart. Hardship and testing – although undesirable in themselves – cause people to remember God and to know their dependence upon Him. We frequently need external stimulus to keep our eyes on God's promises and to keep our hearts directed towards loving Him. Prosperity on the other hand is good and desirable in itself, but in combination with hearts that are not naturally disposed towards dependence and faithfulness, it causes people to forget their need.

[17]

Verse 17 counters the thoughts of testing God (and being tested by Him) with another exhortation to carefully observe the commandments. If testing God is to question His faithfulness within the relationship, keeping the commandments is a reminder of the correct order of relatedness to Him.

[18-19]

Verse 18 begins by restating much the same command: keeping the commandments and doing what is straight and good are broadly synonymous. The second half of the verse reiterates what was also said before in verse 3. Both verses motivate obedience with YHWH's promises to their forefathers of well-being and inheritance of the good land. The combination of exhortation to covenant-keeping and promise of prosperity is often repeated in Deuteronomy, appearing again even in this chapter, in verses 23-24.

There are some complications associated with 6:18-19:

¹⁸ You shall do the straight and the good in the eyes of YHWH so that it may go well with you and you may go and take possession of the good land that YHWH swore to your fathers; ¹⁹ to cast out all your enemies from before you as YHWH promised.

Firstly, some have argued that this passage differs from earlier ones by making Israel's entry to the land conditional upon obedience, rather than making their obedience a duty once entry has been granted (see reference to this in McConville, 2002:144; and Miller, 1990:106). There is of course no conflict between these, because they are both true of the sort of relationship that God establishes in the covenant. It is His intention to bring them into the land, but not for the sake of it. They are

entering in order to live in His presence. The rebellious generation (brought to mind by the reference to testing at Massah) had already by this time been forbidden to enter and put to death in the desert exactly because they were unwilling to trust God's word. God will not grant success and blessing for its own sake, but only as a fruit of the relationship. Thus, this passage is entirely consistent with the demand for loyalty that has characterised the book so far: Israel is not now being called to *merit* entry into the land by obedience; Israel must merely engage in conquest in the same spirit in which they are to live in the land once conquest has ended. Success and prosperity are promised, but they are contingent upon recognition of order. Rebellion or departing from 'the straight and the good in the eyes of YHWH'⁶⁶ will jeopardise blessing.

The second complication with this passage is the ambiguity of verse 19. It is unclear to what exactly the casting out of enemies is related. The clause may be the result of taking possession of the land or the purpose of possessing the land, or it might be an example of it 'going well'. I think the latter is most likely. Being in an appropriate relationship with YHWH will lead to successful conquest, whereas doing evil in the eyes of YHWH will mean that enemies resist and defeat them, leading to an absence of the peace and prosperity that is intended.

[20]

Verse 20 describes the duty of the faithful man to be prepared to explain the covenant to his children. A son will ask the reason for the covenant laws that they follow.

Much is made of the catechetical form of this passage, and it is certainly significant that there is repetition in this chapter of the need to impress these traditions upon the following generation. Israel is a special people, the chosen vessels of God's plan for restoration of blessing to all nations, and it is therefore vital that the covenant is carefully remembered and followed. However, it should not be overlooked that at the core of this section is an answer to the 'why?' question. Why do they obey laws? What is at the heart of the covenant?

[21]

Up to this point in the chapter, obedience has been repeatedly motivated by reward. If the nation obeys, it will go well with the people. While prosperity language is not entirely absent from the 'model answer' to the child's question, it is noteworthy that reward is not at the forefront of the

⁶⁶ These terms appear only twice in Deuteronomy; on the second occasion (12:28), they are in reverse order, but share similar contexts and repeated ideas (Christensen, 2001:151). In that text, there is again a more overt connection with the snare of Canaanite idolatry and false worship of YHWH. Doing what is right in YHWH's eyes seems still to be more concerned with relational loyalty rather than moral uprightness or legalism.

response. Rather, obedience to the covenant is motivated by God's mighty work to liberate Israel from slavery in Egypt.

If the answer were merely to do with prosperity, it would produce a very different sort of religion. If YHWH worship were like the fertility cults, the absence of good things would be a much clearer indication of God's displeasure. If the motivation was wealth, the interruption of wealth would mean that God needs frantically to be appeased (or abandoned as a failure).

As it is, the motivation is not what God can give but what He has done. His works in the past define His faithfulness, not His gifts in the present. YHWH's mighty act of rescue from Egypt in order to constitute a rabble of slaves as His holy people demonstrates that, in this sort of religion, relationship and grace are primary. Thus interruptions to the flow of good things are no cause for alarm as long as the relationship is intact; the presence of prosperity is a reminder that all comes by God's grace, their absence provides an opportunity to exercise faithfulness in that relationship.

[22]

Verse 22 reiterates that God's acts in history were 'before our eyes': they were witnessed as sure demonstrations that God works powerfully for the good of His people.

[23]

Verse 23 is important because it establishes the intention of God's rescue plan. It reads:

'And we were brought out from there [Egypt] in order to bring us in, to give to us the land that he swore to our fathers.'

This verse recalls Egypt and God's promises to the Patriarchs; it reminds Israel that God rescued them *in order to* bring them into His land. It shows God's intention to bless, and not to forsake them on the journey. While the people were still slaves and thus without inherent merit, God's plan to bring them out of slavery had entry into the land as its goal. It is another demonstration of God's grace at the core of the covenant.

[24]

Only after explaining this basis does the father directly address the place of the commandments. It is only upon the foundation of God's gracious redemption of a downtrodden people that they can truly be understood. Having already received rescue and the gift of a good land, the commandments are there merely to describe the character of the YHWH-fearer. Living in relationship with YHWH as God

demands for loyalty and morality from His people; this in turn is met by the expression of God's favour and liberality.

The promise of blessing here casts the slightest shadow of a warning too. The reassurance that obedience leads to the preservation of their life hints at the corollary to that statement: disobedience to YHWH in His land – after all that He has done – ought to mean the end of life.

[25]

Verse 25 rounds off the father's reply to his son with the unusual declaration that 'righteousness will be to us' if they carefully keep the whole commandment.

The text does not explain how we are to understand 'righteousness' in this context. Weinfeld (1991:349) argues that צדקה can mean a number of things, referring 'both to moral righteousness and legal innocence.' By extension it can refer to merit, and this is the translation that he prefers in this case: 'it will be to our merit'.

Depending on how much weight he would cause the word to bear, I would oppose the use of 'merit' in this context. Already there have been clear indications in the text that we are to put some distance between obedience and merit; for example, in 6:11 what is given in the Promised Land is particularly framed as 'not earned', and the emphasis in 6:21 upon their slave status in Egypt further emphasises grace over merit. Chapter 7:7 will shortly remind the nation that their election was *in spite of* their inherent value (due to there being so little), not because of it. So any interpretation that views obedience as having earning potential should be avoided. If Weinfeld merely means 'to our merit' in the sense of 'behaviour that meets with God's approval' then there is less concern.

Rather than Weinfeld's translation, I think that 'righteousness' is preferable. It is to be understood in the sense meant in the key text in Genesis 15:6, 'Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness'. Genesis 15 and Deuteronomy 6 both have in common that righteousness comes from hearing and believing the word of the Lord, and thus righteousness seems to be meant in the sense of being in right standing with God, relating appropriately to Him.

McConville (2002:145) claims that צדקה is 'fundamentally a quality of God, which becomes an ethical imperative for Israel (33:21). As such, it is at once rectitude, acquittal and the condition brought about as a result. ... Righteousness in this case, then, indicates a standing in God's sight.' He also points out the verse 24 and 25 are in parallel and related in a chiastic ABBA structure:

A: And YHWH commanded us to do all these prescriptions,
 B: to fear YHWH our God for good to us all the days, to keep us alive as this day.
 B': And righteousness will be to us
 A': if we are careful to keep all of this commandment before YHWH our God as he commanded us.

This means that righteousness is being grouped with fear of the Lord, which in turn is firmly within relational-language categories, as we discussed above.

So commandment-keeping is not about earning merit, and blessing is not the earned by obedience. However, obedience is necessary, because it is an expression of fearful, loving covenant relationship with YHWH, and blessing is given because it is the expression of God's favour. Blessing is not mechanically given, but both blessing and obedience are to be found within the sphere of properly ordered relationship with YHWH.

3.3.2 Structure

Deuteronomy is highly organised and multi-layered, exhibiting a variety of other complex features that require us to examine its structure in multiple ways. For example, while it is discourse, it is also a *covenant* document containing *legal* material, placed in a *narrative* setting. Furthermore, Christensen (2001:lxix) argues that it is written for performance, and that its structure is meticulously planned and based on rhythmic units. More than one structural viewpoint will therefore be helpful.

Vassal-treaty structure

In terms of its overall structure, it is widely acknowledged that Deuteronomy exhibits dependence upon ANE vassal treaties, both to 2nd millennium BC Hittite and 1st millennium BC Assyrian treaties. McConville⁶⁷ (1994) identifies the following structural similarities to the Hittite form:

⁶⁷ Note that I have formatted McConville's words into a table, so these are to be regarded as quotations.

Table 3.1: McConville's Vassal Treaty Comparison

Hittite	Deuteronomy
Preamble , announcing the treaty and those who are party to it	Preamble (1:1–5)
Historical prologue , remembering the previous relations between the parties	Historical prologue (1:6–4:49)
General stipulations , setting out the nature of the future relationship between the parties	General stipulations (chs. 5–11)
Specific stipulations , the detailed requirements made of the weaker party	Specific stipulations (chs. 12–26)
Witnesses (gods were called to witness the treaty)	Blessings and curses (chs. 27–28)
Blessings and curses : these are pronounced for loyalty and disloyalty respectively	Witnesses (ch 32)

Wenham (1985:19) calls the 'witnesses' section a 'god list', which he considers to be absent from Deuteronomy.⁶⁸ However, he sees a close correspondence in structure between Deuteronomy and the Laws of Hammurapi, which also includes no such list. Wenham also points out a shared 'document clause' in each of these treaties. He sees the structure as follows:

Table 3.2: Wenham's Vassal Treaty Comparison

Hittite	Hammurapi	Deuteronomy
Preamble	-	-
History	History	History (1–3)
Stipulations	Laws	Laws (4–26)
Document Clause	Document Clause	Document Clause (27)
God list	-	-
Curses/blessings	Blessings/curses	Blessings/curses (28)

Seeing as these treaties supplied a code by which a relationship of peace between a suzerain and his vassal could be maintained, the treaty-like form of Deuteronomy is surely intended to communicate a similar point; it is terms of peace between God and His people, not brought about by the defeat of the weaker party, but by the conquest of her captor.

⁶⁸ McConville (*ibid*) argues that the act of calling heaven and earth to bear witness is a monotheistic replacement of the god list, and hence includes it in his structure.

It is perhaps possible that a relationship of peace could be called into being by the keeping of the code itself, but typically the code would preserve peace otherwise established. Hints in the text of chapter 6 suggest that the latter is the case. Therefore, the stipulations / laws are not likely to serve as the means by which relationship with God is established, but rather as a description of the character of that relationship.

Chapter 6 falls within the stipulations / laws section, and may broadly be seen as part of the general stipulations for maintenance of the covenant.

The structure of chapter 6

Syntactic analysis of chapter 6 (see Appendices for grammatical diagrams) suggests the following structural divisions, based primarily on the extent of verb chains in this chapter:

- 1-3 Purpose of the commands
- 4-9 Hear YHWH
- 10-12 Do not forget YHWH
- 13 Fear YHWH
- 14-15 Prohibition of following other gods
- 16 Prohibition of testing YHWH
- 17-19 Promotion of obedience
- 20-25 The reason for obedience

Verse 1 begins in a similar way to the opening of the book itself ('These are the words...'), which suggests that verse 1 may be the head of a new section. However Verse 3 includes the verb **וְשָׁמַעְתָּ** in *weqatal* form, suggesting that it is part of an expansion on an earlier head verb. There is no candidate for an antecedent verb in verses 1-2, but the verb **תֵּלֶכְךָ** ('you shall walk') in 5:33 is possible. Thus the opening verses may belong to a unit begun in chapter 5. The refrain at the end of verse 3 signals an end to the section.

The command to hear in verse 4 is a new head verb, and all the subsequent verbs ('love,' 'teach,' 'bind,' 'write,' etc.) in verses 5-9 form a chain of *weqatal* verbs, expanding upon the characteristics of the 'hearer'.

Verse 10 begins a new section, but with a dependent clause. Its head verb occurs in verse 12.

I argued in the preliminary analysis that verse 13 occupies a bridging role; its verb ('you shall fear') is a *yiqtol* and thus may mark it out as a head verb, but it also occurs mid-sentence because the object of the fear, YHWH, has been promoted to the beginning of the sentence for emphasis. Verse 13 may thus belong with the command to keep watch on oneself (verse 12), or it may stand with one or more of the imperatives that follow.

Verses 14-19 contain four commands. The first two (14-16) are both prohibitions and both are in *yiqtol* form, as is the first positive command ('You shall keep,' verse 17). The fourth is a *weqatal* ('and you shall obey'), and so related to verse 17. Thus this section could be seen as a unit or broken into any or all of the sections 14-15, 16, and 17-19.

Verse 20 does not technically begin a new section, because it is a dependent clause beginning with **כי**. The conversation between father and son described in verses 20-25 is obviously of a different form to the list of commands that precedes it (and thus may be treated separately), but it is somehow connected to the preceding material. Presumably it means to communicate that the man who is truly obedient to YHWH also understands *why* he is obedient (and thus explains the meaning wisely to his son).

Poetic / musical structure

The syntactical structure needs also to be supplemented with attention to the poetic and rhythmic devices that give shape to the narrative. Christensen (2001:lxxxiv-lxxxvii) argues that Deuteronomy is arranged throughout its length in multiple layers of chiasms, with smaller chiastic units combining to form larger ones.

By his analysis (2001:133), Chapter 6 of Deuteronomy is not a single subunit. The first three verses of the chapter belong with the recollections of God's appearance on Sinai that begin in 5:23, but also serve in a bridging role, concluding the previous section concerning the Decalogue and introducing the next main section in 6:4-7:11. He proposes the following structure (2001:137):

6:4-9	A	The great commandment: Love YHWH your God
6:10-15	B	Remember to fear YHWH, for He is a jealous God
6:16-19	C	Be careful to keep the commandments
6:20-22	X	Tell your children of the exodus from Egypt
6:23-25	C'	God will preserve us if we keep the commandments
7:1-10	B'	Destroy your enemies for you are a holy people
7:11	A'	Summary: Keep the commandment

This analysis seems persuasive to me. Much as 6:3 has the feeling of summation, 7:11 also seems to serve as a general conclusion to the section, and its concern with God's commandments is clearly paralleled by 6:4-9. Secondly, with the exception of an opening וַיְהִי in 6:10, both the 'B' sections begin with exactly the same line: כִּי יְבִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ ('when YHWH your God brings you into the land'). The idea of each of these sections is related too. The first emphasises the potential for new-found prosperity in the land to lead the people into idolatry, and the second emphasises the potential of the wicked inhabitants of the land to do likewise.

Thirdly, Christensen (2001:150) argues strongly that study of rhythm and repetition indicates that 6:16-25 is a unit, providing God's people with motivations to keep the commandments. His study of the prosody⁶⁹ of the book has helped also to explain an otherwise puzzling feature of the grammar, the so-called *numeruswechsel*: the repeated switching between a singular and plural hearer.

Excursus: Numeruswechsel

Deuteronomy frequently interchanges between singular and plural. For example, in verse 4, 'hear' is singular, but the pronominal suffix ('our God') is plural, and in verse 7, 'teach' is plural and 'speak' is singular. There is no firm consensus as to the reason for these changes or their purpose. It has often been assumed that they are the result of layers of redaction. Weinfeld (1991:15-16) notes key interpreters of this kind, but indicates some instances in which it strains credulity that this might be evidence of strands of redaction. The interchanges often take place within the same sentence, and it becomes difficult to believe that an editor would feel free to conflate sources, but not to harmonise number. Weinfeld (1991:331) prefers the view that these are mainly stylistic variations introduced by the same author.

Christensen (2001:ci) argues that most of these number changes in Deuteronomy can be explained as structural markers, 'particularly of boundaries between rhythmic units of the text, and sometimes the centre or turning point, within specific structures'. In other words, the change in number is an aural signal that alerts listeners to shifts in the discourse, or to areas of particular importance.

Thus the example of verse 4 noted above helps to indicate that it is the start of a major new section, whereas, of the example in verse 7 he says,

'From a rhythmic perspective, the next phrase serves to separate v6 from what follows, and divides the whole into two similar subunits.' (2001:142)

⁶⁹ That is, attention to rhythm, emphasis, and other features of the spoken text.

This is an attractive solution to the problem of the *numeruswechsel*, but it is naturally open to dispute. I consider it to be the most plausible explanation for the device.

Christensen's analysis of the use of this device adds strength to his explanation of the structure of this passage.

3.3.3 Synopsis

Following the giving of the Ten Commandments in chapter 5, Deuteronomy 6 explains what is at the *core* of the commandments. On the basis of sheer weight of repetition in this passage, one might get the impression that *obedience* is at the core of the covenant, but numerous details in the text militate against that view. Each section of this chapter demonstrates that obedience is very much secondary to the relationship that it serves.

The fear of YHWH (6:1-3)

Structurally, verses 1-3 seem to belong with the exhortations to obedience at the end of chapter 5. These are repeatedly motivated by means of blessing; obedience will result in long life, and the broad, comprehensive promises of goodness and great increase. Yet in the midst of exhortations that seem otherwise to promote a mechanical obedience-reward pattern, verse 2 interjects with a purpose clause that cuts against this pattern. The commandments have as their primary goal the fear of YHWH; that is, the acknowledgement of and obedience to a properly ordered relationship with Him. The fear of YHWH produces obedience to His commandments, and the blessed result – lengthened days – arises out of these relational conditions.

This is critically important, because the mechanistic pattern is interrupted here with a purpose that is overtly relational. It is not the keeping of commandments that compels God to grant long life, but rather it is the relationship of fear of YHWH that is the sphere in which blessing results. Obedience to the commandments is not a transaction with YHWH, it is a means of learning how to relate to Him.

The Promised Land

Verses 1-3 also describe an important role for the Promised Land. Firstly, in verse 1, the land is the arena in which Israel is intended to exhibit obedience and experience prosperity. This confirms the strong connection between this location and blessing. Secondly, as we have observed in the analysis, verse 3 encapsulates the whole body of hopes and blessings in the key phrase, 'A land of milk and honey!' It stands summatively for all of the good promised in this section.

Revisiting the blessing of long life

One of the blessings common in Deuteronomy is that of long life. We noted in the analysis of verse 2 that length of days is a blessing that presupposes ideal living conditions. It is only a blessing if it is the extension of *good* life. However, this is additionally evident within the environment of the Promised Land and within the sphere of relationship with YHWH. In a land blessed by YHWH, and in loving, familial relationship with Him, the lengthening of days would necessarily mean the lengthening of the enjoyment of blessing. Good life in God's presence is restoration of Paradise lost. This additionally explains why exile was the severest of punishments: Israel would thereby be re-walking the shamed footsteps of Adam out into the unyielding soil of curse.

The love of YHWH (6:4-9)

Verses 1-3 have hinted that it is relationship with YHWH that is at the core of the commandments, and this is made more explicit in the remainder of the chapter.

Christensen's structural analysis of this chapter describes 6:4 – 7:11 as one chiasmic unit. Chiasms may influence meaning in a few possible ways. They may invite comparison of parallel sections, or they may serve to draw attention to the outer stratum and especially to the central crux point. Thus, if Christensen is correct, there may be intended points of emphasis in this chapter that require our attention. We will proceed with the synopsis bearing in mind the possible effect of the chiasm.

Verses 4-9 teach that God is God alone and is therefore worthy of love that consumes the whole being. If YHWH's people truly apprehend who He is, then it follows that love from the heart is the reasonable response, and that willing worshipful obedience should characterise all spheres of life.

Although the concept of love is common to ANE treaty documents, Deuteronomy does not use this language merely to mimic generic treaty language. The relationship is far more personal. Perhaps even as far back as Eden the relationship of YHWH as Father to man, His son, is implicit. In the promises to Abram the relationship into which YHWH called him replaced the relationship with his kin. Here the idea of love also surely surpasses duty and hints at relationship between God and His people that is more familial than political.⁷⁰ It is patent here in the 'Great Commandment' that a properly ordered relationship is primary in the covenant, and it is the goal for which the commandments and prescriptions aim.

⁷⁰ This hint of fatherhood is made stronger in Deuteronomy 8:5.

Perhaps it is fitting that the text proceeds to advocate that instruction of the commandments should be undertaken within the family relationship. It is the father's role to instruct his son about the relationship that mankind has with God.

Christensen argues that this passage stands parallel to 7:11. The latter functions as a summary conclusion, saying:

Therefore, take care to follow (שמרתם) the commands, decrees and laws I give you today. (ESV)

The key idea is that obedience to YHWH's commands requires care.⁷¹ Verses 4-9 of chapter 6 support this conclusion by specifying the manner in which obedience should be undertaken.

Forgetting YHWH (6:10-15)

Against the more comforting and warm relational exhortations, verses 10-15 juxtapose stark warnings of punishment for those who enter into covenant with Him and claim the benefits, but do not love YHWH.

The passage begins by emphasising how much God has given in order to remind the people of what is demanded in return. It begins therefore with grace: the land is undeserved, unmerited, received as a gift. It is full of good things that Israel had not worked for. The text then contrasts the gift with the beneficiary: this land is given to a nation of slaves. Interestingly, it is the very goodness of the land that would lead to the nation 'forgetting' Him.

The section that Christensen regards as parallel, 7:1-10, also includes a reminder of God's grace. It is demonstrated in the idea that God will bring them into the land and drive out the nations, though they are larger and stronger (7:1); He will deliver them over to Israel (7:2); He has chosen Israel (7:6); He chose them without reference to their inherent worth or number or merit (7:7); and He made them a nation by redeeming them from their desperate, valueless position as slaves (7:8). Their election was based only upon God's love and His promises (7:8).

7:1-10 provides much more detail about forgetting YHWH too: it includes intermarriage, tolerance of false worship, and outright idolatry. Similarly to 6:15, it ends with a warning that idolatry will eventually cause God's wrath to turn upon Israel: God is willing to be a warrior in judgement of His

⁷¹ The verb 'to keep, watch' is related to the task of a watchman or gatekeeper, so the ESV's slight over-translation at least correctly communicates that more is implied than mere observance. God's covenant is to be lived out with watchfulness.

own people too. In 7:10, and in contrast to the covenant keeper who loves God from the heart, covenant breakers are described not merely as forgetful, but as those who *hate* YHWH.

Obeying YHWH (6:16-25)

Verses 16-19 and 23-25 form the 'C' sections of Christensen's chiastic structure. This material responds to forgetfulness of YHWH with exhortations to obedience. Negatively, verse 16 urges the people not to test YHWH by rebellion. Positively, they must do what is right and good in His sight.

The second wing of the chiastic structure belongs to the father's response to his son, but it shares with 16-19 the emphasis upon obedience. Both texts also reiterate the good things that God promises to do for those who love Him and remain faithful. 6:25 makes a unique contribution in the introduction of the concept of righteousness, which (like Genesis 15) seems to be a declaration of right relationship with YHWH. This is important, as it once again grounds the receipt of prosperity in the sphere of relationship, not in merit-payment.

Why obey YHWH? (6:20-22)

Finally, verses 20-22 comprise the central section of this concentrically structured unit. In this passage, a child asks his faithful father the reason for the commandments. In this question, the author sets up an opportunity to state unambiguously what it is that understands to be most crucial to the covenant and its long list of laws, what is at its heart.

As mentioned earlier, concentric structures often intend to draw emphasis to the central section. It is fitting that this structure should centre upon a question that has already claimed its own importance. If that is the intention in this unit, the chiasm drives home forcefully what has been quietly pervasive in the remainder of the text: even though commandment-keeping features so repetitively, it is actually the unmerited grace of the Exodus that is the focal point.

The father is to answer his child with the briefest retelling of Israel's redemption: they were a nation of slaves under the ownership of Pharaoh, and God delivered them with the might of His own hand. Though they had no inherent value or claim, God freed them and gave them all that they have.

It seems likely that the child's 'why?' question is meant to be the question that all Israel asks and answers about their law-keeping. What is the reason for obedience and loyalty? It is because YHWH redeemed them and brought them out of Egypt in order to bring them into relationship with Him in the environment of the Promised Land. For the purposes of this study, what it establishes with

abundant clarity is that obedience to command is *responsive* to redemption and the promises. God acted on His intention *while they were still slaves* to bring them into the land of blessing. There was no merit prior to God's intervention that caused Him to act. The whole shape of blessing is modelled on grace, not on merit.

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Before tracing out the conclusions of this study, it is helpful to see how the themes of this chapter relate to other relevant texts.

3.4 INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

In this section, we will briefly discuss the content of blessing, the role of the land in Deuteronomic blessings, the foundational role of grace and relationship, the threat of wealth, and the role of ethics in prosperity.

3.4.1 Content of blessing

We have already noted in the word studies of chapter 1 that prosperity is a broad concept that encompasses a number of domains, including wealth, fertility, ease, rest, success, and so on.

Deuteronomy 6 included a short list describing the blessedness of the land, but the list of covenant blessings and curses at the end of the book gives a much more detailed account of what is meant by the promise of blessing.

Blessed / exalted name

Deuteronomy 28 begins its list of blessings in a slightly unexpected place: with the blessing of a great name:

‘And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.’
(28:1, ESV).

In fact, it is a very suitable place to start, because this verse emphasises some very important themes, namely:

- This is a constitutional document⁷² and as such it is appropriate to talk about blessing in national terms.
- The blessings are in continuity with the promises to the Patriarchs, who are referred to in this regard on seven occasions in Deuteronomy.
- There is a reminder of grace: it is *YHWH* who will set them in their high position.
- The blessing is not merely reputation; it is comprehensive. Being above the nations would put Israel in the position of superpower. This would imply the absence of threat and the enjoyment of prosperity.

The greatness of Israel's name is also put in terms of their holiness to God in 28:9, which is both an honour and a responsibility. If the responsibility is honoured, 28:10 promises that the watching nations will see the mark of *YHWH* upon the nations and be afraid. The fulfilment of this fear is seen clearly, for example, in the words of the people of Jericho (Joshua 2:9f).

Israel's greatness among the nations will also mean economic power ('And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow,' 28:12, ESV), and general success ('And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down,' 28:13, ESV).

Comprehensive blessing

While this national blessing already implies comprehensiveness, Deuteronomy 28 also makes an effort to directly speak of the breadth and depth of blessing. For example (all ESV):

- 'Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.' (28:3)
- 'Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.' (28:6)
- 'The LORD will command the blessing on you... in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.' (28:8)
- 'The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands.' (28:12)

⁷² As is the likely implication of Deuteronomy 27:9; but due to a quirk of the thematic arrangement that I have chosen, we will discuss this earlier chapter below.

Wealth / fertility

While it is common for opponents of the so-called Prosperity Gospel to downplay material blessings (e.g. [Muehlenberg, 2012](#)), Deuteronomy 28 emphasises wealth and the fertility of the land in verses 4, 5, 8, 11, and 12.

Success / victory

Finally, Deuteronomy 28:7 may also be construed as a promise of success, here in the military arena: 'The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways' (ESV).

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So, there is a considerable weight of detail in this chapter describing what blessing in the land will entail. Fourteen verses are devoted to reinforcing how total is God's plan to prosper His people. However, this is not the most noteworthy feature of the chapter. Its remainder warns of what will happen if there is disobedience and idolatry in the land. It uses all of the same terminology employed to describe blessing, but reversed. It doesn't merely match the blessings with curses in this way. While the blessings are covered in fourteen short verses, the corresponding curses run from 14-68 in grim, graphic detail.

God knows the human heart, and presumably the excitement of hearing of all the good things in store was likely to dull the ears to anything else. Israel needed to remember, as we do, that the good that is offered is not offered for its own sake, and the neglect of the relationship in which blessing is intended to operate would lead to curse at least as comprehensive. They needed to be shocked out of any hints of greed or covenantal complacency that may have crept in at the listing of such riches. If they rebelled, the land of blessing would become a dark, hostile enemy for their destruction.

3.4.2 In the land

A key idea that this thesis hopes to demonstrate is that there is an exclusive connection of promises of blessing to the land of promise. Given that the story element of Deuteronomy is set on the edge of the land, as Israel is about to receive the promise of the good land, it is to be expected that Deuteronomy would frame blessing in terms of land. For this reason, we are obliged to resist the urge to see proof for this hypothesis in land statements in Deuteronomy. Nevertheless, the number of connections of blessing to land is not without significance. We have already seen in chapter 6 that

the land could be used symbolically to represent blessing and prosperity in general, and so below I shall merely list without further comment some other verses that make this kind of connection of land and blessing (all ESV):

- ‘And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, *in the land* that he swore to your fathers to give you.’ (7:12-13)
- ‘The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you *in the land* that the LORD your God is giving you.’ (28:8)
- ‘And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, *within the land* that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.’ (28:11)

3.4.3 Grace relationship

The theme at the core of chapter 6 was God’s grace in giving good to a people who had no inherent merit. This is foundational to the sort of relationship that the covenant is intended to call into being. Grace is extended in order to bring the relationship to life, and in response, Israel is to live in a way that acknowledges God as her God. This is spelled out to mean that Israel must love, fear, and obey.

Deuteronomy 27 begins the blessings and curses material with these words:

‘Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today.”’ (27:9-10, ESV)

This passage tells us at least two important things. Firstly, it seems to identify Moses’ speech and the document of Deuteronomy as a national constitution. Moses says that it is ‘this day’ on which Israel were made a nation, and it is marked by the establishment of a covenant document. Perhaps it is the inheritance of a national territory and not the law-giving that makes them a nation, but either way, it is the second part of this text that matters more. So secondly, this text identifies the relationship between God’s grace and Israel’s law: the fact that YHWH brought them out of slavery and to the land to give it to them (grace) is *prior* to the demand that they respond with obedience. Thus the ESV renders the Hebrew as ‘this day you have become... You shall *therefore* obey’.

Chapter 27 goes on to describe a ritual that the nation was to observe upon entering. Six tribes were to congregate on Mt Gerazim as a symbol of the path of blessing, and six tribes on Mt Ebal as a symbol of the path of curse, and the Levites were to read warnings of twelve curses to all the people that they were to accept. That there were twelve curses pronounced – one for each tribe – is surely intentional. According to Craigie (1976:331), the Mishnah describes the Levites calling out six blessings towards Gerazim, and six curses towards Ebal, which makes superficial sense. However, the text does not indicate the presence of expected blessings. This may simply reinforce what we see in chapter 28, namely that blessings are easy to remember and curses easy to forget, which in turn requires sheer volume of warning to correct that imbalance. It may also have been important for the *whole* nation to be associated with warning, rather than associating certain tribes with blessedness and the rest with curse. It is not about *which tribes* stand on which mountain, but *which path of life* each tribe will take.

What is additionally surprising is the content of the curses. There is no attempt to represent each commandment of the Decalogue, and neither is there an obvious attempt to represent Israel's most heinous sins. Craigie (1976:331) suggests that there may be a general theme of *secrecy* underlying the choice of these sins, emphasising therefore the things that the law is not able to prosecute. Undiscovered crimes are still crimes against God, and therefore liable to covenant curses. What matters is how one is related to God, not the law courts. This theme, if it has been correctly identified, would tie in nicely with the call for love for God from the heart: obedience must be internalised, and not merely directed towards good public standing.

Whatever the reason for the selection of these crimes, the one that interests me most is 27:18, 'Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.' If this is to be taken literally as mere misdirection, rather than a some sort of theft that takes advantage of the inability of the blind man to identify the criminal,⁷³ then what is condemned here is an attitude of malice that takes advantage of the weak, even if only for sport and with relatively minimal harm caused. This act would not normally be considered serious enough to prosecute in most societies, and yet it appears in this list of twelve curses. It indicates that God is concerned also with the character of His people, with the moral condition of their hearts. It supports the idea that relationships are more important than mere outward compliance.

⁷³ See for example Craigie (1976:333).

3.4.4 Wealth as threat / need for testing

Although wealth is a blessing, scripture does not *always* regard it as a blessing. God's desire to bless with plenty is always measured against the corruption of human sin that makes this blessing into an evil. We see this in chapter 6 in the warning that the goodness of the land may lead to Israel forgetting God.⁷⁴

Even in the Exodus, at the birth of the nation, this duality is evident. God's desire to prosper the nation is demonstrated in the surprising willingness of the decimated Egyptians to send them on their way with 'plunder', and this wealth provided the means for the building of the tabernacle, but it was also presumably the wealth that went into the manufacture of the golden calf. This same pattern is evident in Deuteronomy 7 too.

Deuteronomy 7: wealth as snare

Deuteronomy 7:25-26 develops the theme of the dangers of wealth. It reads:

'The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction.' (ESV)

While this passage begins as a warning about idols, the focus quickly shifts to the silver and gold with which they are adorned. It is the silver and gold that ensnares them. The passage seems to intend to mean that the precious metals are the initial incentive to keep the idols, and the idols themselves become a snare; surely the 'abominable thing' that is brought into the house is idol itself, not the silver and gold. One way or another, this passage brings wealth and idolatry into association again.

What is especially important, though, is that this scenario highlights that wealth has the potential to appear desirable above the command of God. It is generally a good thing, a blessing, but in these circumstances Israel must choose between lesser wealth enjoyed within the sphere of relationship with God, or great wealth obtained through greed and disobedience.

So irrespective of whether wealth itself is idolatrous in this passage, it still highlights the potential for the lure of wealth to draw people away from the covenant, and it shows that the *possession* of wealth is certainly not a reliable measure of one's blessedness before God.

⁷⁴ Even in Proverbs, which is often so positive about wealth, it is regarded as a danger that provokes people to disown God; having 'daily bread' is the ideal (30:8-9).

Deuteronomy 8: hardship and testing before prosperity

One of the investigations of importance to this thesis is the role of hardship and testing in the theology of blessing. It receives no direct attention in Deuteronomy 6, but is implicit in the warning that wealth itself has the potential to test allegiance to YHWH, to forget Him and to put their prosperity in an idolatrous position.

The role of testing is made explicit in Deuteronomy 8:1-10, which speaks of it as a *necessary* component of the covenant. I argue that, although it is part of a separate pericope, it ought to be considered in connection with chapter 6 because it reiterates the themes and language of chapter 6. It begins with the common call for obedience as a condition of blessed life in the land:

‘The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers’ (8:1, ESV).

It also expands upon the idea of the land as one of milk and honey, and there is repetition of the warning about forgetfulness:

‘And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments...’ (8:10-11, ESV).

However, the unique contribution of chapter 8 is to show the role of the testing in the wilderness and the blessing of the Promised Land beyond the mere punishment of the rebellious generation. According to this chapter, the testing in the wilderness was intended to do the following:

- To show what was in their heart, whether obedience or rebellion (8:2)
- To teach the Israelites humility and dependence upon God (8:3)
- To teach that ‘man does not live by bread alone’ (8:3)
- To show that God is able to preserve them even through hardship (this seems to be the implication of 8:5)
- To discipline them as sons (8:6)
- To motivate praise and thanksgiving when they experience the fruition of blessing in the land (8:10)

Verse 2 is significant to the theme of testing, because it demonstrates that hardship serves to test the heart. An implication of Satan’s argument⁷⁵ at the start of the book of Job⁷⁶ is that qualities such

⁷⁵ Albeit only semi-legitimately.

as faithfulness and obedience cannot really exist unless there is opportunity to behave otherwise. The suggestion is that God would not know reliably that His people had a heart to love and obey *Him* unless they could demonstrate that love in the absence of everything else; if their following met only with ease and reward, it would not be possible to tell whether their behaviour was motivated by love or greed. Testing Israel in the desert required the people to trust and obey YHWH *in spite of* their circumstances. Under repose, the human heart may be inclined towards loving the gift; under hardship, it can only turn to the giver (or against Him).

Verse 3 is similarly important, not least because of its links to Jesus' testing in the wilderness in which he would answer Satan with this passage. It says:

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (ESV)

This verse communicates that material things, here represented by 'bread' (which would include food, but may be applied more broadly), must not be considered an end in themselves. Life does not ultimately depend upon meeting needs or accumulating other good things. What God's people need to learn is that our life and our good depend ultimately upon YHWH, and more particularly upon His word.

In this verse, 'every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord' is phrased ambiguously so that it may serve a dual purpose. In the context of the supply of manna, it refers to the *ex nihilo* creation of this mysterious food by the command of the Lord. That act demonstrated that YHWH is the one who spoke all things into being, and thus is the one upon whom it is appropriate to rely.

In the context of the argument of the chapter, this clause stands representatively for obedience to the covenant that also proceeded from the mouth of the Lord. It directs Israel's attention to the commands being delivered to them, identifying them as the path to genuine life. Given that it has already been made clear that the commands exist to maintain orderly, loving relationship with God, this verse communicates that the 'bread' that they receive in the land – the good things, their prosperity – is intended to point them to His life-giving words, to relationship with YHWH.

Verse 5 concludes saying:

⁷⁶ 'Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.'" (Job 1:9-11, ESV)

Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. (ESV)

Clearly, testing is to be viewed as a necessary component of relationship. As long as humanity is prone to wandering from God, testing and hardship are important tools by which God shapes our hearts in order to direct our wills towards relationship with Him. Interestingly, the nature of that relationship is clearly shown to be familial and beyond mere contractual loyalty; the text falls short of calling God our father, but that is the relationship used in the simile, and surely meant to underline the way in which His people were to understand the call to love and fear. So, hardship should not be viewed as an aberration in the life of God's people, but rather as training in obedience to God as Father.

Finally, verse 10 is also significant. After describing the incredible fruitfulness of the land, it says:

And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. (ESV)

This is the desired result of testing: a disciplined son learns to accept the gifts from his father by expressing thankfulness and praise in return. A properly ordered relationship that is forged through hardship is able to receive prosperity without being corrupted by it, but rather to see it as an expression of the grace and love of a generous father.

3.4.5 Wealth and ethics

The next significant thematic element that requires broader discussion is that of the *ethics* of prosperity in Deuteronomy. It is necessary here to say something about how the Bible is to be used in theology and ethics; i.e. by what means do we translate Israel's scriptures into moral imperatives for us? This is particularly pressing here in dealing with Israel's law and how it relates to us.

Using the Bible in theology and ethics

I argued at the end of the first chapter that the Christian church and Old Testament Israel do not share the same Promised Land. Old Testament Israel is to be viewed as a 'shadow'⁷⁷ of God's ultimate intention; it is a scale model of what God has planned for the whole world. Thus in the New Covenant a number of Old Testament forms undergo something of a metamorphosis, whether it be merely one of expansion to a global scale or a full flowering of what had before only been a bud.

⁷⁷ In the sense meant by Colossians 2:17 and Hebrews 8:5; 10:1.

The restoration of Israel to the Promised Land is one such form. Instead of merely returning Israel to His land, God expanded the invitation to the whole globe; and not only is it merely a golden age of rest from the enslavement of her enemies, but the total eradication of enmity itself.

Similarly, the nation of Old Testament Israel is not identical to the Christian church. As I also argued in chapter 1, we are most closely related to the nation under exile, as that too is our paradigm. We are not a landed people, and even just on these grounds it makes it inappropriate for us to adopt covenant laws intended to govern a nation at home in the land of promise.

Furthermore, the law itself is not taken up unchanged into the Christian era. It can be spoken of as unchangeable (e.g. Matthew 5:18) and abrogated (Galatians 3:24-26) and upheld in spite of all the radical changes (Romans 3:31).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into the explanation for this, but suffice it to make two points. Firstly, the Torah was not ever meant to be a complete, self-sufficient body of universal laws. The law was always meant to be ‘on the heart’, that is, absorbed into one’s being in order to convert one’s entire moral outlook and will.

‘The best way to approach the Old Testament ethical system as “Torah” is to remember that the purpose of the Old Testament is not primarily to give information about morality... but to provide materials which, when pondered or absorbed into the mind, will suggest the pattern or shape of a way of life lived in the presence of God... “Torah” is a system by which to live the whole life in the presence of God, rather than a set of detailed regulations to cover every individual situation in which a moral ruling might be called for.’ (Birch quoting Barton, 1991:38)

Secondly, the law was not a comprehensive moral resource, but an illustrative one. Many of the laws for Israel were transparently symbolic, not moral. The food laws, for example, eschewed creatures that are superficially dirty or otherwise hard on the eye (such as pigs and crustaceans) and had a preference for creatures that in form or lifestyle could be more easily be associated with clean living. Mark 7:19 locates the seed of Christian departure from these laws in the teaching of Jesus, who made it abundantly clear that the point of such laws was to provoke thought about moral pollution. Food itself has no power to defile.

Therefore, when Paul in Galatians 3 describes the law as a pedagogue, he gives us the basic solution to the paradoxical New Testament attitudes to the Torah. It existed to train people in the character of YHWH, not as an end in itself. Israel was to learn about life with God by imbibing His laws, but they were to take hold of that *character*, not merely to keep the laws.

School mathematics is a good illustration of what I mean. One learns the methods and principles of mathematics by means of problems that one is taught to solve. The teacher demonstrates how one solves a certain problem by means of algebra, for example, and one attempts to learn algebraic thinking by solving similar problems with the same method. The aim is to create the pattern of thinking that would enable the student to answer any problem of that type. It would be foolishness if the student only memorised the answers to the problems set in class. The latter student has not learned algebra, the former has. Similarly, the person who keeps Torah religiously but legalistically has not learned Torah; he is attempting to fake it. The one who keeps Torah is the one who is able to adapt its principles and character to new circumstances.

In the New Testament, with the expansion of God's project across the face of the globe, and in the absence of an Edenic Holy Land, the whole law can be kept in Spirit by the possession of God's character, even though the old letter is no longer relevant to the new context.

The Christian moral imperative is not merely a matter of law-keeping, whether of the old covenant laws or a new code. To use some of Birch's (1991:37f) categories, our ethics is founded on the 'will, activity, and character of God'. This includes the most commonly accepted moral resource – God's explicitly revealed will (i.e. His laws and direct commands) – but it is not limited to this.

Firstly then, the revealed will of God is important. Even the Old Testament laws still serve to teach us the character of God though they are not binding on us in the same way. They were always intended to enshrine a principle, and that principle hasn't been eradicated even if the law has. It is appropriate for us, therefore, to examine Deuteronomy and to try to discern God's character in the laws given. It is legitimate for us to derive moral imperatives for our age from Israel's laws, as long as we have correctly discerned their underlying nature.

However, secondly, we need also to go beyond just what is commanded. Old Testament moral instruction isn't limited merely to explicit moral statements. Birch (1991:38) says,

'It is a one-sided emphasis on obedience to God's explicitly stated will that results in the caricature of the Old Testament as bogged down in legalism. Too narrow an emphasis here tends to reduce Old Testament morality to prescriptive legislation as the main focus.'

Focus must be given to the character and activity of God too. The Old Testament also encourages imitation of God in verses such as Leviticus 19:2 ('You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy', ESV). The New Testament likewise commands the church to be imitators of God (e.g.

Ephesians 5:1) and imitators of the faithful (e.g. 1Thessalonians 1:6; Hebrews 6:12), and we have models of behaviour in the works of God, and the good and bad of His people, in biblical narrative.

Birch (1991:39) adds response to divine works to the sources of moral instruction:

‘Our stress on the character of God would encompass such a divine modelling of human behaviour [as Leviticus 19:2], but is broader. It also includes morality which arises in *response* to the experience of the presence and activity of God. To have experienced the deliverance from bondage in Egypt may have some effects in imitating divine behaviour (e.g., in providing for the freedom of slaves), but its far greater moral impact is in engendering responses of humility and praise for the gift of God's grace and in fostering reflection on what it means to live as God's delivered people in the world.’

Thus, as we reflect upon the teaching of Deuteronomy, we have a number of these elements present: clearly there is an abundance of material that can be characterised as the revealed will of God (the Decalogue, for example, and some or all of the more detailed legal material); there is also Moses' narrative recounting their deliverance from Egypt and wilderness wanderings; and there is an element of reflection on and response to what God has done. It is possible for us to discern in Israel's laws a sense of God's character and disposition towards rich and poor, and sensitively to draw out from the book some more generic imperatives to guide Christian ethics.

Society structured as a response to rescue?

Prosperity terminology in the Old Testament tends to be directed at *community-wide* peace, contentment, and security, rather than individual, and the laws enshrined in Deuteronomy reflect that communal emphasis. What we have discovered in archaeology about early Israel seems to reflect this. Politically and socially, they displayed a preference for the success of all rather than the elite. Wright (2004:55) describes early Israelite social organisation as decentralised, non-hierarchical and kinship-based, rather than following the feudal organisation of many surrounding city-states. He argues that this social structure was a consequence of the ‘covenantal structure of life’. The covenant regards the whole nation as possessing the inherent status of slaves, but slaves who have been given a shared inheritance under one God. This militated against a highly stratified social pyramid that favoured the few who wielded the most influence. This structure was to facilitate the visible distinctiveness entrenched in Israelite faith and the social ethic that was integral to it. Thus, Wright says,

Early Israelite society... was geared towards the social health and economic viability of the ‘lowest’ units, not to the wealth, privilege or power of the ‘highest’. (2004:55)

Wright's notion that the covenant influenced the way in which society was organised is obviously speculative, but if there is historical basis for the Exodus and Conquest, then this preference for more egalitarian structures may have arisen out of their responsiveness to those events; and if the law code preserved for us in Deuteronomy is reflective of early covenantal ideas and norms for Israel, then it is not difficult to see how many of these laws might have produced such a society.

Israel's laws as limitation on class division

Chapter 6 provides the slightly obtuse command to love YHWH with all one's strength (which at least *includes* wealth, if it is not meant as synonymous with wealth), and it is expanded upon in specific terms later, where regulations are made to govern the use of wealth in service of YHWH. It is clear that Deuteronomy's laws promote generosity, and encourage opportunities for the escape from poverty, even to the hurt of the individually prosperous.

Israel's laws seem calculated to remind Israel that they are all of equal standing before God, and that there should be an inherent concern for the poor such that the rich don't gather too much nor the poor too little. These laws include the following:

Tithing

Deuteronomy 12, 14, and 26 prescribe the offering of tithes, which were to be eaten at the temple before the Lord in order to serve as a reminder that he is the source of prosperity. These were also to serve as a means of provision for others. Blomberg (1999:46f) reckons that tithing may have amounted to as much as 23% of a Jew's annual income, and while much of it was allocated to the giver's own celebrations at the temple, some was intended to feed the priests and Levites and for sharing with those who had little.

In Deuteronomy 26, there is a ceremony that accompanies the tithe in which the offerer is required to recite a truncated history of the origin of the nation in the election of Abram, a wandering Aramean, and its redemption from slavery in Egypt; that is, it is an account of God's grace to people inherently undeserving, at least according to any sort of merit-reward transaction. At the heart of tithing is recall of God's prior gifts of undeserved grace that made prosperity possible.

Maintaining a clear focus upon the Giver rather than the gift is an obvious principle that Israel's charitable giving was meant to enshrine for them. It ought also to be a goal towards which our ethics of prosperity is directed. The New Testament frequently depicts charitable giving and commands it, whether it is to provide dutifully for family, for the needy and defenceless in our midst, for ministers,

and the like, and thus generosity remains one of the ways in which we are encouraged to remember the grace of the divine Giver.

Year of release

Deuteronomy 15 commands that loans made to Israelites be forgiven every seven years. This is stated as a means by which poverty will be alleviated in Israel (15:4,7). They were to give freely, and they were not to take notice of the amount of time remaining before the release of debts, but were to lend even though they were not likely to see their goods returned. This is a clear instance in which those with wealth were commanded to give even to their own hurt, in order to give the needy every opportunity to escape poverty.

This command applied even (or perhaps especially) to ancestral lands taken as securities for loans. The inability – at least in the terms of the covenant – of someone to possess another's land for more than seven years placed a striking limitation on the ownership of land.

Although it is so central to the Genesis promises that God would give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants, the Promised Land is more accurately conceived of as only ever belonging to God; it is 'given' to Israel as if to tenants. It is a *gift*, but there is never a transfer of ownership (cf. Leviticus 25:23). The accumulation of land at the expense of the poor, and economic exploitation in general, met with a large proportion of the later prophets' vitriol because it stood in contradiction to God's ownership of the land, His gracious gift of it, its status as the place of blessing, and His desire that it should represent His goodwill to the redeemed poor. Wright explains:

[Prophetic outrage at economic injustice] did not stem from a general concern for human rights... It was not even a merely economic issue: it was deeply spiritual. Anything that threatened a household's economic viability or drove them out of secure tenure of their portion of the land of the Lord was a threat to that household's secure membership of the covenant people. To lose one's land was more than an economic disaster: it struck at one's very relationship with God. (2004:91)

The land could not be used as Israel saw fit, because the 'gift' of the land was not an obligation-free one. It was part of the covenant by which Israel was bonded to the Giver. The land was given as the environment of relationship for God and His people, not left to the disposal of the recipient.

The land as divine gift ought to have been seen as a symbol of dependency upon God. 'A wandering Aramean was my father' (Deuteronomy 26:5) was a declaration that the Israelites were meant

regularly to make, in order to indicate their consciousness that they were ‘aliens and strangers’ in the land, without inherent claim to it (Wright, 2004:85).⁷⁸

So, the year of release protected the freedom of God’s people in the land (their slavery could not be long-term) and the security of their future in it (their land could not be permanently lost to another family). But the year of release in Deuteronomy 15 also indicates God’s purpose for poverty.

The purpose of poverty emerges out of an extremely important paradox that Moses sketches in 15:4 and 11. Compare these verses:

‘But there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess.’ (15:4, ESV)

‘For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, “You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.”’ (15:11, ESV)

In concert, these two statements help to explain one another. The former *appears* to say that God will not allow any person to fall into poverty in His blessed land, as if His blessing will ensure financial security for each individual. However, this makes little sense of the context that presupposes people will be poor. The latter confirms that there will in fact always be those who are poor. These two can be brought into harmony if one understands verse 4 to be referring to the whole community of Israel. In other words, the Lord will bless *some* within His land with wealth, and they in turn are to be a blessing to those who are in need. In so doing, those who presently experience prosperity ensure that the whole community will be without want (‘there will be no poor’). The latter verse, 15:11, merely indicates that it is *not God’s intention to do away with poverty* in His land. God’s ideal (at least while people are sinful) is not the miraculous provision of wealth and ease for every individual. He *intends* for poverty to continue, because there is value in His people practicing mutual care, sharing, and generosity.

This is critical because it establishes that God’s intention to bless is communal not individual, and that the mechanism by which He commonly blesses is *the generosity of His people*. The way in which God’s people experience the good life and the state of *shalom* is by human love and liberality mirroring that first given by God.

⁷⁸ A ‘resident alien and tenant’ was typically used of a class of person who did not own land, or who had no claim to it, such as a displaced Canaanite or an immigrant. To use it of an Israelite indicated just how fragile their ‘ownership’ was and how dependent upon the true owner. If they rebelled against His authority, their protection would be withdrawn and they would be landless aliens again (Wright, 2004:94). This is reminiscent of Jesus’ parable in which he describes Jewish leadership as tenancy of a rebellious kind.

It is also noteworthy that there is absolutely no suggestion in this passage that those who are given the trial of wealth are being rewarded for faithfulness, and those who are given the trial of poverty are being punished for some spiritual deficiency. The responsibility for the rich to look after the needy seems to exist simply to see whether God's people understand the grace that they themselves have received. The blessing of wealth is itself a test of the hearts of the people as hardship.

This is made abundantly clear in 15:15. After requiring all slaves to be released on the 7th year, Moses also commands that they be sent away with enough provisions to get a new start. It is an allusion to their own release from slavery in Egypt in which they were sent away with valuables as a gesture of goodwill. In verse 15, it then specifically motivates this behaviour towards slaves by means of an explicit reminder of God's redemption:

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. (ESV)

This motivation is common to the majority of the calls to radical generosity, as we shall see.

Therefore, though we no longer have slavery or divinely appointed family estates, there are purposes to these laws that are transferrable to us. Firstly, Israel's most primary possession – their land – was always to be thought of as belonging to God. They lacked inherent claim to it. This communicated their dependence upon God for their homes, livelihoods, and everything else. Similarly, we have no inherent claim to any possessions, as all come from God. The year of release compelled Israelites to prioritise the grace of God who redeemed them over their private claims to property. Similarly, we ought also to learn to hold possessions and debts with a loose hand.

Secondly, the fact that God gave gifts unequally to His nation taught that there is a human responsibility within God's promise to bless. If God's people will only receive and not give, God's prosperity project will (and did) fail. From this we see that God prizes generosity and mutual dependence and love far above prosperity for its own sake. Perhaps if we're unable to exhibit interdependence and love for people that we can see, it is impossible that we should truly possess those qualities with respect to God whom we can't see. If we love our prosperity too much to diminish it in order to prosper a fellow member of God's family, the chances are we love it more than the Father who gave it too. We are supposed to learn willingness to give, even to our hurt, because we first freely received everything that ever could be gained by God's costly gift of redemption.

Justice for the poor and defenceless

Deuteronomy 24:17-22 commands that the defenceless – widows, orphans, and aliens – must not be deprived of justice. The given motivation is Israel's own redemption out of helplessness in Egypt. They too were foreigners in Egypt without defender or legal recourse. Because God is a redeemer, His people should not play oppressor.

This passage also supplies a particular example of how justice can be done to the poor and to strangers. It describes the harvest of various crops, commanding that landowners make only a single sweep of their fields, so that these same poor and defenceless members of society are able to support themselves off of what has been left behind. Since certain crops ripen in stages, this might have represented a significant loss of income for the farmer, yet such was the commitment that was required of the wealthy. This too is motivated by their redemption from slavery in verse 22.

These laws demanded significant self-sacrifice. Israelites subject to the laws of Deuteronomy might be tempted to worry that keeping such laws exposed them to too much risk. The sense that one might be giving away too much was confronted head on in the laws of Sabbath and Jubilee, which are not represented by name in Deuteronomy but are comparable with the seventh-year release commanded by chapter 15. The Sabbaths and the Jubilee required the suspension of economic activity for a prescribed period of time. The text directly acknowledges the objection that this will leave them without food even for a year or more (e.g. Leviticus 25:20-22), to which God responds saying that He will provide more abundantly in the sixth year than is required for two or even three years. If they kept His laws, He would provide.

The strange thing about the Jubilee promise is that God is required to provide superabundantly on the sixth year, before the Israelites are required to commit themselves to ceasing their labours on the seventh. Thus it is not a test of faith through hardship, but rather a test of faith through prosperity. They would not have been required to leave a field fallow and then to have to trust that God would somehow provide later; it isn't a leap of faith that God later rewards. It's not a reward at all. Assuming that God did live up to His promises to them, the Israelites would have taken in a remarkable harvest and then, in the midst of wealth, they would have been required not to replant. The temptation would presumably have been to want to capitalise on the radical growth in net worth in the sixth year by taking no losses in the seventh, treating the gains of the sixth year as an end in itself and trying to gain even more the next year. Thus, the test in Jubilee is to see whether Israel would honour the relationship with God instead of working for a higher net worth. It requires them to love God more than money.

So, to return to Deuteronomy's command that landowners must leave a substantial portion of their agricultural yield hanging on the vines for the benefit of the poor, Blomberg (1999:38) points out that, in the storyline of Deuteronomy, these people were *still eating manna*. God's provision of manna actively demonstrated the principles that were here being enshrined in Law. It demonstrated that God was willing and able to provide in even the most desperate of circumstances: giving away 'too much' of one's wealth is not a problem in the land of a God eager to bless and powerful to do it. Manna also taught that those who gathered little had enough and those who gathered much did not have too much. It aimed at providing enough, but making hoarding impossible: any left over would decay. In a foretaste of God's promise to provide (even for whole years of rest) during Sabbaths and Jubilee, there was no manna on the Sabbath and the extra collected the day before did not rot as on other days. Thus, even in the midst of an already-miraculous phenomenon demonstrating that God is provider, His double-provision for the Sabbath was an additional demonstration that 'man does not live on bread alone'; the relationship of dependence and obedience, the relationship that gives and demands generosity and grace, is the priority.

Finally, Blomberg (1999:46f) also points to tithing (itself an ersatz taxation system) and the temple tax as two further demonstrations that there was a strong egalitarian flavour even to later social organisation, and a concern for shared wealth rather than individual excess. Tithing depended on income, but the temple tax (Ex 30:13) was the same amount for rich or poor, indicating that each member had equality before God. He concludes:

Abundance of tithes and taxes makes it clear that Israelites were not free to enjoy unbridled prosperity, but rather that their gain was to be directed towards the good of all. (1999:47)

So, as Wright (2004:164f) argues, the Torah has built-in a number of safeguards that prevented excessive growth: there was no outright ownership of land or sale of anything but its temporary production potential; there were laws (particularly those of release and Jubilee) that limited debt; and there were laws (such as prohibitions of lending interest) that limited accumulation. Deuteronomy 17 commands even the king that he must not accumulate large amounts.

These kinds of limits amount to acts of grace on the part of the wealthy. They do not make sound business sense. As such, they are frequently motivated by appeals to redemption from Egypt and the covenant relationship with YHWH, which act as reminders that whatever wealth one has and whatever benefits one thinks one deserves, these all have their roots in the prior grace of God.

Thus it is clear that God favours communal health over private wealth, and that the motivation of our redemption from the pit and the grace of God ought to dominate our ethical positions regarding

wealth. The good that we have received undeservedly from God should compel us to wish to give freely in response so that what we have can be for the good of all.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

Having examined the text and some of its themes in the rest of the book, we are able to draw the following conclusions:

3.5.1 The content of prosperity: Broad scope of blessing

Deuteronomy includes long lists describing the goodness of life with God and the bounty of the Promised Land. The strong emphasis upon the material wealth of the land – its fertility, its mineral wealth, its abundance of good things – makes it absolutely clear that God's promises of blessing to Israel should be understood to include material things.

The blessings in Deuteronomy are frequently described in comprehensive terms. To those who love the Lord with heart, soul, and strength – that is, comprehensively with one's whole being – God also indicates that His blessings extend full life, provide plenty, and give satisfaction.

However, the comprehensiveness of blessing is matched by the appalling depth of curse for those who rebel and defile the land with idolatry.

3.5.2 The ethics of prosperity: Generosity

Deuteronomy 6 commanded that God's followers love and fear Him comprehensively. Inasmuch as such deep inner commitment is a severe challenge, it is also not sufficient to regard it as something that can remain merely internal. The inner life of man determines his actions, and thus loving YHWH with the heart means that one's will and decisions (and therefore one's actions) must be directed towards Him. Similarly, to love with all one's strength includes all the means at one's disposal. Deuteronomy demands that property and social standing are all to be used in service of YHWH.

Many of Deuteronomy's laws aim at promoting generosity and encouraging opportunities for the escape from poverty. Tithing for the upkeep of the Levites and for gifts to the poor; harvesting only once so that the poor could glean what remains; the cancelling of debts, including purchased land and slaves, after a maximum of seven years – all of these laws worked to reduce social inequality even to the hurt of the individually prosperous. The principle taught by the distribution of manna

became enshrined in law too: the rich mustn't gather too much nor the poor too little. It aimed at providing enough, but making hoarding impossible.

Generosity emerges in Deuteronomy as an ethical ideal, and it supplies the purpose for YHWH's intention to let poverty persist in the land. Chapter 15 includes the paradox that the Lord's blessing will provide so that there are no poor in the land (i.e. there is sufficient for all), but also that there will never cease to be poor in the land (i.e. distribution of that sufficiency will be unequal). The fact of unequal distribution is the basis for the command in 15:11 to open wide one's hand to the poor. In other words, there is enough prosperity in the land for all, but God desires that His people learn the grace of giving and receiving. Poverty exists so that grace can be put into action. Most of the commands to radical generosity are motivated by God's gracious, unmerited redemption of Israel from slavery. The patterns of life that God establishes for His people are intended to be grace-shaped, as we shall see again below.

This establishes that God's intention to bless is communal not primarily individual, and that the mechanism by which He commonly blesses is the generosity of His people. For both rich and poor, then, wealth is a trial of faithfulness. Both have to learn to love YHWH more than the riches that they have or lack, and both need to learn to mirror God's grace in their own lives.

Finally, it is apparent that this is a general state of affairs and not one motivated by specific reward or punishment of individuals. We shall survey the dynamics of prosperity in Deuteronomy below, but it is already clear that wealth and poverty are not awarded on the basis of recompense.⁷⁹ It is also noteworthy that there is absolutely no suggestion in this passage that those who are given the trial of wealth are being rewarded for faithfulness, and those who are given the trial of poverty are being punished for some spiritual deficiency.

3.5.3 The environment of prosperity: The Promised Land

This thesis aims to motivate the idea that the Promised Land is the exclusive environment of the promises of prosperity. Drawing conclusions from Deuteronomy in this regard is surprisingly difficult, not because statements in support of this hypothesis are rare – they are in fact plentiful – but rather because the statements about the land can be explained in other ways. Given that they are on the brink of entering their inheritance for the first time, it is expected that so much of the discourse

⁷⁹ This is not to say that they *may not* be awarded on this basis, but simply that there is no mechanical gift of good things to the good and bad things to the bad.

mentions the phrase ‘in the land’, and these mentions may intend to say little about whether the converse is true *outside* the land, which is what my thesis requires.

Nevertheless, Deuteronomy is at least consistent in its testimony to the land as the environment of blessing, even if it falls short of speaking of it as exclusively so. Deuteronomy 6:3 is important, however, as it seems to speak of the land as a synecdoche: it stands representatively for *all* the blessings. This may not be a conclusive argument that blessing is limited to the land, but at very least it puts land and blessing in a close and significant relationship.

3.5.4 The sphere of prosperity: Relationship

The most important contributions of Deuteronomy 6 to the theme of prosperity are in the description of the relationship in which blessings are given, and the dynamics according to which prosperity operate.

It is an observation supported time and again in the text that God’s intention in His dealings with people has always been to establish a relationship of a certain type. God’s covenant with Abram in Genesis 17:7-8 is described as God being his God, and Abram’s seed His people. This basic description of the relationship is common to a number of later covenant statements (e.g. Exodus 6:7; Deuteronomy 29:10-13). Deuteronomy, and especially chapter 6, serves to add detail and definition to those relational roles.

Firstly, there is the *fear* of YHWH, which Deuteronomy 6:2 states is the goal of the commandments. While terror is an appropriate response of man to God, it is not this sort of fear at the heart of the relationship, but closer to that of father and son. Fear language is appropriate because it implies respect and submission – it captures the hierarchical order inherent in the relationship – but fear in Deuteronomy is also used in parallel constructions with concepts such as ‘love’, and it is clear that it includes also the inward love of God, loyalty to Him, and willing obedience.

Secondly, Deuteronomy urges *love* of YHWH, which is related to ‘fear’, but emphasises the deep feeling and close relationship that should motivate obedience and loyalty. God’s people are not to be driven by a mere sense of duty, or by fear of punishment, or by greed for reward. The inner life is intended to be dominated by love for YHWH. The Torah itself is meant to be located on the heart. Following God and His ways is not a matter of formal observance and mere compliance. It should spring from inner desire, the will to love. Deuteronomy describes blessing in connection with an internalised relational covenant.

Even Israel's interpersonal relationships were to be shaped in this way. Deuteronomy 27:18 warns of a curse for those who mislead the blind, which shows that neither the severity of the transgression nor the ability to prosecute the crime is important to God's view of His people. The relational principles enshrined in law must be embedded on the heart, such that even minor instances of malice and cruelty against the weak are always seen as part of the curse.

Thirdly, Deuteronomy 6 raises the testing at Massah as an object lesson. It teaches that God's people are not to provoke Him by doubting His will or ability. The relationship requires trust and fidelity whether they receive prosperity or hardship. It also teaches Israel that their worldview ought to hold the Exodus at its centre. The rebels at Massah forgot the Exodus, and consequently forgot God's power, His redemption, and His promises. God's character and His acts of salvation stand as demonstrations of His will to do what He promises, and this needs to define relational behaviour.

Finally, 8:3 built upon the themes of chapter 6, adding that 'man does not live by bread alone'. We saw that this verse was employing the story of manna to teach that the 'bread' that they receive in the land – the good things, their prosperity – both comes from God and is intended to point them to His life-giving words, to relationship with Him.

3.5.5 The dynamics of prosperity: Absence of cause-and-effect

Deuteronomy 6 has a surprising amount to add to the theme of the dynamics of prosperity. While the book ironically seems on the surface to support the idea that obedience is rewarded with blessing, upon reflection, it is clear that this is not a valid inference. Deuteronomy answers the question of whether prosperity is awarded on a cause-and-effect basis with a resounding 'no'.

Firstly, the book is structured as a typical vassal treaty, which typically preserved a relationship already established by other means. The historical preface of the book and repeated refrains emphasise that the rescue of the people from Egypt on account of the promises to the patriarchs was the event that brought the relationship into being.

Evidence in chapter 7 serves to distance God's motivation for that rescue from any inherent value in the people themselves. Verses 6-8 emphasise that they were rescued while they were the least of all the peoples because of God's promises, not because of their value. In short, their rescue and their relatedness to God were neither earned nor merited. These were given under God's initiative by grace, not reward.

The emphasis upon grace extends also to the gift of the land and the prosperity contained within it. In chapter 6, Moses says, 'You did not build... you did not fill... you did not dig... you did not plant'. The good things that they were about to enjoy were prepared in advance for them, with the emphasis on their lack of labours of any kind to bring them about. Brueggemann (1977:48), in his biblical theology of the land, says:

'The rhetoric at the boundary is that of pure gift, radical grace. There is no hint of achievement or merit or even planning. It is all given by the giver of good gifts and the speaker of faithful words.'

Prosperity leading to curse

Deuteronomy introduces another element to the dynamics of prosperity, namely that the gift of blessings may be a catalyst for people to forget God. Because people are in Adam's line, good gifts may provoke love for the gifts at the expense of the relationship with the giver. Satisfaction gives way to self-satisfaction, and ultimately idolatry.

Prosperity ought to be a blessing and it ought to provoke praise of YHWH, but in combination with a heart prone to straying it can lead to rebellion and curse. Thus, rather than prosperity being a reward for faithfulness, it emerges that it can actually be a test of loyalty. Until sin is not a factor in the human heart, prosperity will always be as much a danger as it is a blessing.

Deuteronomy 7:25-26 warns against coveting the gold and silver out of which the idols are made, which would become a snare to them. It highlights that wealth has the potential to appear desirable above the command of God. In this, and again in the command to leave fields fallow every seventh year, Israel is called to choose a relationship of obedience to God above the lure of great wealth obtained through greed or disobedience. Although it ought to be a blessing, wealth has the potential to corrupt the loyal, and to occupy an idolatrous position.

Commandment-keeping not meritorious

Even though commandment-keeping appears so repetitively in Deuteronomy 6, at the centre of its concentric structure is a reminder of the unmerited grace of the Exodus. This is given as the answer to the child's 'why' question, and it supplies the motivation for obedience to the law. Therefore, obedience is responsive to gift, not meritorious in itself.

Deuteronomy 6 ends with the declaration that obedience will be 'righteousness' to them, by which it is meant that obedience to the covenant will be characteristic of those in right standing with God.

Obedience does not *earn* right standing, but it is a quality of the human side of the relationship; it is part of what it means to have YHWH as God and to be His people.

Commandment-keeping is not about earning merit, it is merely part of the human commitment to relationship with God. It is characteristic of the righteous, but it does not *produce* relational right-standing. Furthermore, prosperity is not the reward of obedience, but it is part of the divine favour that He offers in relationship with mankind.

The role of testing

Genesis 12 suggested that testing is a means by which God shapes the sort of relationship that he desires to have with His people. Deuteronomy develops this element of the dynamics of prosperity too, making it a function of a fatherly God. Hardship and testing are viewed as discipline, which is a necessary part of raising children, and thus necessary also for the covenant relationship. Without such discipline, the heart inclines towards the gift, not the giver.

Thus, Deuteronomy focuses much of its warnings upon the dangers of prosperity as a test. To repeat a couple of the examples, the Jubilee promise required the Israelites to commit themselves to ceasing their labours on the seventh year, rather than capitalising on the miraculous harvest of the sixth. The gift of prosperity to some in the land and not others tested to see whether they would give graciously in the face of need. Thus hardship is not the only test of obedience, but prosperity too serves this function.

.....

Deuteronomy teaches that prosperity is a mixed blessing; it can become a curse if it is combined with a heart that is not totally given over to the love and fear of YHWH. The next study looks at an era that bemoans the failure of Israel to have a heart for Him; Jeremiah 32 is set in the middle of Babylon's siege of Jerusalem as the curses of Deuteronomy are finding their final fulfilment.

4. JEREMIAH 32

Jeremiah 32 belongs to the so-called 'Book of Comfort' (chapters 30-33) in which all of the disaster and hopelessness brought on by the devastating defeat at the hands of the Babylonians is met with words of consolation, promises of unimaginable blessing, and hope in a New Covenant.

4.1 TRANSLATION

¹ The word that was to Jeremiah from YHWH in the tenth year of Zedekiah King of Judah; it was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. ² And at that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem; and Jeremiah the prophet was being restrained in the prison court, which was the house of the king of Judah, ³ for Zedekiah King of Judah had restrained him, saying, "For what reason are you prophesying saying, 'Thus says YHWH "Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will capture her. ⁴ And Zedekiah King of Judah will not escape from the hand of the Chaldeans⁸⁰ but he will surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon and he will speak to him mouth-to-mouth and see him eye-to-eye.⁸¹ ⁵ And (to) ⁸² Babylon he will make Zedekiah walk, and there he will be until I visit him,⁸³" says YHWH, "Though you fight the Chaldeans, you shall not prosper"?"

⁶ And Jeremiah said, "The word of YHWH came to me saying, ⁷ 'Behold, Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle will come to you saying, "Buy for yourself my field that is in Anathoth because to you is the right of redemption to buy it.'"

⁸ "And Hanamel my cousin came to me, as YHWH said, in the prison court, and he said to me, "Please buy my field that is in Anathoth that is in the land of Benjamin because to you is the right of possession and to you the redemption. Buy it for yourself." And I knew that his was the word of YHWH. ⁹ And I bought the field from Hanamel my cousin that is in Anathoth and I weighed out to him

⁸⁰ In this chapter, we will use the terms 'Chaldean' and 'Babylonian' interchangeably.

⁸¹ Thompson (1980:585) points out that this idiom has nothing to do with the English, 'to see eye-to-eye with x'.

⁸² Lundbom (2004:503) says 'the preposition "to" is omitted by ellipsis.'

⁸³ Keown *et al* (1995:151) suggest 'until I decide his fate' as an interpretation of this phrase. As discussed below in the Preliminary Analysis, there is an ambiguity about this phrase such that it is unclear whether the visit of YHWH will be for good or ill. Keown's rendering communicates the openness of Zedekiah's fate, however it locates the indecision in YHWH. If there is such openness, it is surely because it depends on Zedekiah's response, not on something uncertain in YHWH. Thus I'd favour a translation that preserves ambiguity, not indecision, even if it means woodenly translating the Hebrew idiom without concern for English equivalence.

the money: seven-and-ten shekels of silver. ¹⁰ And I signed the scroll⁸⁴ and sealed it and I caused witnesses to bear witness and I weighed the silver in the scales. ¹¹ Then I took the scroll of the purchase, the sealed commandment and prescriptions,⁸⁵ and the opened one. ¹² And I gave the scroll of the purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, before the eye of Hanamel my cousin and before the eye of the witnesses that signed the scroll of purchase before the eye of all the Jews sitting in the prison court. ¹³ And I commanded Baruch before their eye, saying: ¹⁴ “Thus says YHWH of hosts, God of Israel, ‘Take⁸⁶ these scrolls – this scroll of purchase: the sealed one and this opened scroll – and put them in an earthenware vessel in order that it may stand many days.’”

¹⁵ “So thus said YHWH of hosts the God of Israel, ‘Houses and fields and vineyards will yet be bought in this land.’

¹⁶ “And I prayed to YHWH after I gave the scroll of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah saying: ¹⁷ ‘Alas, Lord YHWH, behold, you⁸⁷ made the heavens and the earth in your great power and with your outstretched arm; nothing is too difficult for you, ¹⁸ showing lovingkindness to thousands and repaying⁸⁸ the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their sons after them; the God great and mighty, YHWH of hosts is his name. ¹⁹ Great the counsel and mighty the deed,⁸⁹ so that your eyes are opened upon all the ways of the sons of Adam,⁹⁰ to give to a man according to his way and the fruit of his works; ²⁰ you who put signs and wonders in the land of Egypt until this day, and in Israel and in man, and you made for yourself a name as this day. ²¹ And you brought out your people Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and wonders and a mighty hand and with the arm outstretched and with great fear. ²² And you gave to them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give to them, (it is) a

⁸⁴ Shead (2002:114-124) describes scholarly debate concerning how many scrolls are being spoken of in the text of 10-14. Verse 10 appears to speak of one, whereas 11 and 14 seem to describe two (or perhaps even three). Archaeological findings have shown that deeds of purchase had a closed component (the top half was rolled and bound) and an open component on the bottom half. Thus it could be referred to in the singular if the whole document or in plural if by its components. This is not important for our purposes, but because it shows that the MT text of 10-14 is coherent without emendation, it does demonstrate that the longer text tradition of Jeremiah (followed by the MT) may not be inferior to the shorter (followed by the LXX) as is often thought.

⁸⁵ McKane (1996:840) and Keown *et al* (1995:143, 154) mention a number of attempts to account for the insertion of the phrase ‘the commandment and statutes’, which is syntactically unclear and not included in the LXX. Its exclusion from the LXX need not be cause for doubt of its authenticity, however; Lundbom (2004:500, 508), following Shead, believes the MT to be the better text, and argues that many of the omissions in the LXX may have been caused by haplography. Shead’s argument concerning the number of scrolls (see footnote on verse 10) is convincing enough to prompt some optimism about the authenticity of the MT reading, and because there is the likelihood that this phrase intends an allusion to Deuteronomy (see analysis below), I believe that the MT reading should be retained. Grammatically, it makes sense either to take the ‘commandment and the statutes’ to be appositional explanation of ‘the sealed one’ (i.e. ‘the sealed one, that is the commandment and statutes,’), especially if the document in question contained the legal terms only in its sealed part, or to read the participle as adjectival, with the phrase read as ‘the sealed commandment and statutes’, especially if this was a document written in duplicate. I have favoured the second on the grounds that it is smoother to read, as nothing for our purposes rests on deciding between the two.

⁸⁶ The infinitive absolute can function as an emphatic imperative (Lundbom, 2004:511).

⁸⁷ ‘You’ is in the emphatic position; Keown *et al* (1995:141) render it as a clause of basis: ‘Since you have made... nothing is too difficult.’ While this may be full extent of the intended relationship between clauses, I prefer to leave the conjunction non-specific.

⁸⁸ *Piel* Participle of שָׁלַם. Brown Driver Briggs lists ‘to complete, to make safe, to make whole, to make good’ as glosses of the *Piel*. Keown *et al* (1995:141) translate it as a recompense idea.

⁸⁹ Lundbom (2004:513) explains that the addition of *iyya* in the Hebrew indicates an abstract ending, hence the generic singular ‘deed’ is preferred to a plural.

⁹⁰ The word appears in the singular, meaning either mankind collectively, or perhaps the proper name ‘Adam’.

land flowing with milk and honey. ²³ And they went and took possession of it. But they did not hear your voice, and according to your law they did not walk; all that you commanded them to do they did not do. Therefore you have called upon them all this evil. ²⁴ Behold, the (siege) mounds have come up to the city to take it, and the city is given⁹¹ into the hand of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it from the face of sword and famine and pestilence, and what you spoke has come to be; behold, you can see (it). ²⁵ And you have said to me, O Lord YHWH, “Buy for yourself the field with money and let witnesses witness it,” yet the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.”

²⁶ “The word of YHWH came to Jeremiah,⁹² saying: ²⁷ ‘Behold, I am YHWH, the God of all flesh. Is anything too difficult for me?’ ²⁸ Therefore, thus says YHWH: ‘Behold, I give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans and the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will take it. ²⁹ The Chaldeans fighting against this city will come and set this city on fire, [or burn with fire] and they will burn it and the houses that have offered incense upon their roofs to Baal and have poured out libations to other gods, in order to provoke me. ³⁰ For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have been doing only evil in my eyes from their youth. For the children of Israel have only been provoking me by the work of their hands, declares YHWH. ³¹ For this city has been a source of my anger and my rage⁹³ to me, from the day they built it until this day, so that it should be removed from before my face, ³² because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah that they did to provoke me – their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, the men of Judah and those dwelling in Jerusalem. ³³ They have turned to me their back and not their face. And I have taught them again (and again),⁹⁴ but they have not listened to take discipline. ³⁴ They set up their detestable (idols) in the house that is called by my name, in order to defile it. ³⁵ They built the high places of Baal that are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, in order to cause their sons and daughters to pass through to Molech – which I did not command and neither did it enter into my heart to do this abomination – to cause Judah to sin.

³⁶ “Now therefore⁹⁵ thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, to this city of which you⁹⁶ are saying, ‘It has been given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, and by famine, and by pestilence’:

⁹¹ McKane (1996:844) affirms Peake’s rendering of the perfect form as a ‘prophetic perfect’, that is, a future reference that is certain to eventuate. I agree with this analysis, but I think the present perfect ‘it is given’ captures this sense better than a simple future tense (‘will be’) or the perfect passive (‘has been’). It communicates that cosmic permission has been given for the event, if you like, but also that the event is still in process.

⁹² Jeremiah’s prophecy in this chapter began in the 1st person, and thus this perhaps ought to read ‘to me’, as it does in the LXX (Keown *et al*, 1995:147).

⁹³ The syntax of this verse is difficult; the Hebrew idiom has no English parallel. Keown *et al* (1995:157) translate it, ‘Because this city has been mine, to my anger and my rage, from the day she was built until this day, I will remove it from before my face.’ Yet, the preposition ^ל can indicate cause and commonly accompanies verbs of painful emotion (Joüon & Muraoka, 2009:460f), which suggests that the city has caused His anger. Keown’s translation makes God’s possession of the city into the reason for its destruction, with the mention of God’s anger in a relative clause. This seems not to be the sense. Thompson (1980:593) translates approximately as I have, making its provocation the reason for its destruction. His translation reads, ‘For this city has so roused my anger and my wrath... that I would destroy it out of my sight.’

⁹⁴ The infinitive absolute underlying this translation could be understood variously. I have taken it as an intensification of the idea of repetition. Thompson (1980:593) translates it as ‘though I took great trouble to instruct them’, and adds as a literal translation, ‘I instructed them rising early and instructing’. Although this is a different word to the ‘incisive teaching’ of Deuteronomy 6, perhaps it is intended to call to mind the ideal father of that passage.

⁹⁵ ‘Therefore’ in this context is odd, says Brueggemann (1998:307f), because it seems to suggest that verses 28-35 are somehow the cause of verse 36. He strongly denies that this is the shape of the argument, with which I’d agree. Certainly, it does not mean that Israel’s wickedness and idolatry has caused God’s favour. The ‘therefore’ can be retained, however, if it is understood as introducing God’s response to the *state of affairs* previously mentioned; i.e. their wickedness doesn’t cause the favourable response, but their state of desperation (brought on by their wickedness) does cause God to respond, this time in restoration.

³⁷ ‘Behold, I will gather them from all the lands to which I banished them in my anger and in my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell in safety. ³⁸ And they shall be to me a people, and I shall be to them God. ³⁹ I will give them one heart and one way, in order that they may fear me all the days, for good to them and to their children after them. ⁴⁰ I will cut with them an eternal covenant, that I will not turn away from after them to do good to them. And I will put the fear⁹⁷ of me in their hearts, in order that they do not turn aside from (after) me. ⁴¹ I will rejoice to do good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

⁴² “For thus says YHWH: ‘Just as I have brought to this people all this great evil, so I am bringing upon them all the good that I promise to them. ⁴³ And the field⁹⁸ shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, “It is a desolation, with neither man nor beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.” ⁴⁴ Fields shall be bought with money, and scrolls shall be signed and sealed and witnessed by witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, in the surrounds of Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the hill (country), in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes,’ says YHWH.”

4.2 EXEGESIS

We will begin our exegetical study with a preliminary verse-by-verse analysis of the text.

4.2.1 Preliminary analysis

[1]

The passage begins with an introductory clause, supplying the date of the oracle that is to follow. Depending on whose chronology one follows, this places the events in 588 or 587 BC (Keown *et al*, 1995:151), but the exact date is immaterial for our purposes.

[2]

The oracle is given a narrative setting, supplying the reason for Jeremiah’s imprisonment: it takes place in the midst of Babylon’s final siege of Jerusalem, and not only is the prophet being held captive by Nebuchadnezzar in his own city, but he is also the prisoner of his own king. Although this is announced as an oracle, King Zedekiah is the first speaker, recounting at length an earlier prophetic statement uttered by Jeremiah, and asking the reason for it. The king’s question is not so much an inquiry as it is an accusation, a charge-sheet of sorts for his imprisonment (Keown *et al*, 1995:146). This chapter is not narrating a trial, but the king is reported in Jeremiah 37:17 to have

⁹⁶ Plural in the MT, but singular – addressed to Jeremiah – in the LXX. Also in verse 43.

⁹⁷ Emphatic position.

⁹⁸ Keown *et al* (1995:144) note that the LXX uses the plural form, and argue that the definite singular in the MT is intended as a generic reference. It seems possible also that the reference is to the field recently bought by Jeremiah.

met with him privately to inquire after the word of the Lord, and so this exchange may have taken place in such a setting.

[3-5]

It is understandable that the king should call Jeremiah's prophecy into question, because his preaching was so contrary to the 'orthodoxy' of his day. In spite of the attribution to YHWH, Jeremiah would have sounded to the establishment like a heretic and traitor.⁹⁹ Thompson (1980:92f) characterises many of Jeremiah's utterances, such as these recorded in chapter 32, as seemingly 'seditious' because of how different his perspective was to that of the authorities. The reasons for Zedekiah's displeasure are evident in his charges.

Firstly, Jeremiah appeared to side with the Babylonians and his prophecy may have been construed as an attack on the king, promising him failure (v5); capture and the face-to-face judgement of Nebuchadnezzar himself (v4)¹⁰⁰; and the final 'visit' of YHWH in exile (v5). This latter statement is ambiguous,¹⁰¹ as in scripture the 'visit' of YHWH can be either for good, such as bringing about Sarah's fertility (Genesis 21:1) or Israel's rescue (Genesis 50:23-24), but it can also be for disaster, such as bringing plague or punishment (e.g. Exodus 32:34-35). Thus the promise here is either that Zedekiah will be exiled until YHWH restores him, or that he will be in exile until YHWH kills him.

McKane (1996:837f) lists a collection of scholars who favour either the view that YHWH's visit is a note of hope, or that it is a threat. Seeing that Zedekiah includes it among the evidence of Jeremiah's alleged rebellion against the state, it is natural to expect that the visitation is not intended positively, and it appears many times in the book as a euphemism for punishment (e.g. 5:9, 29; 6:15). Yet as Allan (2008:366) notes, the famous promise of return from Babylon in Jeremiah 29:10 uses the same verb, which is a close precedent for it being a positive promise in this chapter. In fact it is probably neither hope nor threat, because Allan adds that Jeremiah 34:2-5 echoes the fate of Zedekiah here using parallel terminology, but in the place of YHWH's promise to 'visit', chapter 34 has the gentler promise that, despite all the horrors that await Zedekiah, he would at least not die by the sword but

⁹⁹ For suspicion of treachery, he was beaten and imprisoned in a dungeon in Jeremiah 37:15. In 37:19-21 Jeremiah points out to Zedekiah that many of the words of the competing prophets had already proven false, and this at least motivates the king to spare his life and improve the conditions of his imprisonment. However, in Jeremiah 44, 16ff the exiles in Egypt say that exclusive worship of YHWH was to blame for their calamity, which demonstrates that Jeremiah's message was not viewed as orthodox in his day.

¹⁰⁰ Holladay (1989:213) points out that the words of Jeremiah here end up being ironic given the fate that befalls the king in 39:5-7, as the eye-to-eye meeting was the last thing Zedekiah saw before he was removed.

¹⁰¹ Lundbom (2004:503) says, 'The verb *pqd* ... occurs frequently in Jeremiah, its usage often yielding an understatement or a statement having deliberate ambiguity.' He is unclear however whether he thinks this is an example of the latter.

in peace, and that he would be mourned for as for his fathers. Thus, it is likely that the visitation of the Lord in Babylon is a euphemism for the king's death, albeit as positive a statement about death as can be made under the circumstances.

Secondly, the prophecy may have seemed to be an attack on YHWH Himself. Jeremiah has already charged the royally sanctioned prophets and priests with falsely proclaiming **שָׁלוֹם** when there was not to be any (6:14 and 8:11). Clearly, orthodox belief held that YHWH would defend His city and not allow His name and His sanctuary to be desecrated by foreigners. To suggest otherwise may have seemed to imply that YHWH lacked either the faithfulness or the power to defend His name, His place, and His people.

[6-7]

Verse 6 begins with 'And Jeremiah said...', as though in conversation with Zedekiah, and he proceeds to recount the story of a premonition that he received from YHWH that his cousin would arrive and attempt to sell him a family field.

It is not clear whether Jeremiah's words here are meant to be read as a response to the charges (e.g. Fretheim, 2002:454), or whether verses 1-5 are parenthetical (e.g. Lundbom, 2004:504; Thompson 1980:587), supplying the context for Jeremiah's prophecy and the reason for his imprisonment, with the prophecy itself being unconnected to the king's words.

There is not much at stake in this question, because even if parenthetical, such a detailed and lengthy introduction has been supplied by the author for a reason. The king's complaint against Jeremiah is a necessary backdrop to the oracle given in response, inviting comparison.

However, arguments in favour of parenthesis have occasionally neglected or even obscured the relationship between verses 1-5 and the rest of the chapter, and so it is important to address these.

For example, Keown *et al* (1995:147) argue that Jeremiah's words should not be regarded as a response to Zedekiah because the answer does not fit the question; the passage ought to be addressing the king more obviously and expanding upon the judgement theme.

This is not necessarily the case, firstly because YHWH, speaking via Jeremiah, is not duty-bound to answer in a predictable way, and nor does His answer need to stay strictly within an expected group of topics, such as judgement. It is characteristic of Jesus' prophetic ministry, for example, not to answer his interrogators directly. It is typical of him to respond with a parable, or to meet questions

with other questions, often with the intention of drawing the direction of the conversation where he would have it.¹⁰² Thus, the seeming failure to answer the charges directly may be intentional.

Secondly, the strange conjunction of the king's charges and Jeremiah's response is often treated as something to be *solved*, rather than understood. Thus the unity of this passage and the role of its more unusual features often go unrecognised. For example, many commentators have assumed the duty of 'correcting' features of the text that appear awkward. Unexpected elements are often dismissed as clumsy redactions and secondary insertions or moved to a location that the scholar feels more comfortable with. This is deeply problematic, as from a literary perspective, it militates against the author's intentional deployment of surprise. Brueggemann (1998:15) rightly points out that literary analysis plays an important role in understanding the evocative role of literature, rather than presuming a merely descriptive role for it. He says:

'This requires a "close reading" of the text in which one pays attention to the use, repetition, and arrangement of words, shifts in voices, deliberate verbal strategies that cause breaks, surprises, contrasts, comparisons, ambiguities, and open-ended wonderment in the text. The interpreter focuses on the action and voice of the text itself and is not led away from the actual work of the text by any external reference or hypothesis.'

Thus, the fact that Jeremiah's words do not neatly rebut the king's charges is not much of an obstacle; Jeremiah, as representative of YHWH's word of *judgement upon the king*, is necessarily not answerable to the king. On the contrary, he is to convey the sense that the king is answerable to YHWH. Despite being the king's captive, he is not playing defendant; he is the prosecutor.

Thirdly, it is incorrect that the answer does not fit the question. True, Jeremiah does not obviously defend himself, yet his words arguably do address all of the issues that the king raises. Jeremiah's words include a lengthy demonstration that it is the unfaithfulness of the people that was responsible for the Babylonian destruction, not the failure of God; they reiterate that this punishment is a fulfilment of God's covenant promises, not a violation of them;¹⁰³ they make

¹⁰² In Mark 10:17-18, Jesus meets a polite question ('Good Teacher, what must I do to be saved?') with a seemingly unrelated question ('Why do you call me good?'). Jesus' question is pertinent, however, as it raises the key issue of spiritual lack. Yet it only makes sense after much reflection.

¹⁰³ Fretheim (2002:456) suggests that Jeremiah's words function as a reply also because judgement at the hands of the Babylonians was the only path by which restoration could eventually come:

'Zedekiah's "Why?" question is considered and answered: Judgement must fall upon Jerusalem, because it is only through that refining fire that any hope for the future of the people of God becomes possible. Life can only come through death.'

His ideas perhaps err on the side of the poetic, but his is at least another suggestion as to how the oracle might be seen as connected to the king's words that preface it.

repeated reference to return and restoration, demonstrating that God is not abandoning His covenant; and they affirm God's absolute power over all things, including recounting the deliverance from Egypt. Thus the prophecy does answer the charges that Jeremiah was treacherously siding with Babylon or blasphemously predicting the defeat of YHWH or His forsaking of His covenant. Yet, it is the king and the nation that is on trial, and so Jeremiah's main goal in responding is to read off God's verdict, not to answer his own charges.

Thus, while it not important whether the text is viewed as accusation-and-response or parenthesis-and-oracle, it is important to consider the text as a unit, and the role that Zedekiah's words play in framing the terms of Jeremiah's oracle.

[8]

'And Hanamel my cousin came to me, as YHWH said.' In verse 8, Jeremiah describes the arrival of his cousin happening as YHWH had said. Yet there are slight differences in Jeremiah's presentation of Hanamel's words and the words that YHWH said he would use. Fretheim (2002:469) claims that this shows that YHWH only had knowledge of the gist of Hanamel's speech, but not the exact words. I would judge this to be the worst and most injudicious of the possible narrative reasons for Jeremiah to report inexact repetition.

There are three main differences in Hanamel's version, namely: the addition of the field's Benjamite location; the additional emphasis upon Jeremiah's *duty* as redeemer; and Hanamel's repetition of the command 'buy'. The simplest reason for the differences is that YHWH's version may be slightly summarised, because the repetition is meant only to show correlation between premonition and event. However, differences between speech and report can often be used to emphasise the material that is added or omitted, and in this case I think that the additional information in Hanamel's version may be intended to tell us more about his character and motivations.

The first difference appears to have little importance, although perhaps the revelation that the field was located in Benjamin may have communicated to astute hearers something of its state of occupation by Babylon. The second difference seems to emphasise Hanamel's manipulateness. God had prepared Jeremiah for the appeal to his duty as kinsman, but Hanamel doubles the appeal, seemingly in an effort to coerce the sale. The third difference, the repetition of the command to buy (including the polite entreaty **וְיָבֹא**), either reinforces the sense of coercion in Hanamel's version, or reinforces the conclusion in Jeremiah's mind that acquiescing to the request is YHWH's will. There had been no explicit command from YHWH to buy the field, although many commentators suggest that YHWH's revelation of the transaction itself is implicit approval of it (e.g. Keown *et al*, 1995:145).

This duplication of the plea for Jeremiah to buy the field may have been confirmation for Jeremiah that the purchase was God's will. This may thus have been part of the reason for his claim, 'And I knew it was the word of YHWH'.

There is difference of opinion also as to how Hanamel's motives should be understood. Holladay (1989:212) points out that Jeremiah 11:18-23 describes a plot against his life devised by his relatives in Anathoth. He believes that Hanamel's offer 'was a sign from YHWH that not all the members of "the house of his father" (12:6) would continue to deal treacherously with him.' He also expresses certainty that Hanamel's request is borne of desperation because his land was in danger of being sold (1989:213). Keown and McKane also fail to see anything strange in Hanamel's request. Keown *et al* (1995:152-3), following Holladay, suggest that 'it is tempting to see in vv7-8 a reconciliation of sorts,' and consider it to be Jeremiah doing a favour for his cousin. McKane (1996:840) calls it his 'right and duty'.

Hanamel offers no explanation for the need of redemption, and thus we never learn for sure whether he was a worthy recipient of help or not. What we do learn from the text is that the most immediate threat to his land was the presence of the Babylonians on it; this certainly is the reason for Jeremiah's own incredulity towards land transactions in this passage (verse 25). It is possible of course that Hanamel needed money to pay off a creditor,¹⁰⁴ but he may simply have preferred cash because it would remain valuable even in Babylon; either way, he clearly didn't mind giving up land that had no value while the Babylonians were on it. Hanamel's actions represent loss of confidence in Judah's future.

Even if Hanamel genuinely did require help, it is surely not Jeremiah's sense of duty or family reconciliation that is central to the tone of this passage, but rather how bizarre it was for him to acquiesce to this request to be paid out for an inheritance that was at the time all but in the possession of the Babylonians (cf. Brueggemann, 1998:301). A number of details in the text emphasise the strangeness of it. Here in verse 8, Jeremiah specifically affirms that it was the word of the Lord that motivated him to make the purchase, not a sense of duty that made it a foregone conclusion in the first place. Secondly, there is a show made of the completion of the legalities of the

¹⁰⁴ There are imaginable circumstances that could have caused Hanamel's problem. Perhaps he merely needed *money* for a debt – I'd suspect creditors would have been wary of claiming land against debts under the circumstances – and the land itself was his only valuable asset. On the other hand, we know that economic activity did persist in Benjamin under Babylonian occupation (Lundbom, 2004:521), and so perhaps the land in that region retained some value such that a creditor (or perhaps even the Babylonians themselves) would have realistically been interested in claiming it. Hanamel may therefore have been legitimately attempting to keep land in the family. Yet Jeremiah's prayer emphasises that the Babylonian presence is a serious problem to land ownership itself, so the latter options are unlikely.

purchase, emphasising how secure the deal was; this punctiliousness is most easily explicable if the purchase was counter-intuitive. Thirdly, it is explained as a sign-act in verse 15, and these were frequently strange and controversial attention-getting acts (as in the *locus classicus*, Ezekiel 4, and indeed in Jeremiah's other sign acts, such as in 13:1f; 16:1f; and 19:1f); we'd expect this therefore to be an extraordinary transaction. And finally, Jeremiah's entire prayer in response culminates in a sense of utter disbelief that he should purchase land when all is already lost. Clearly, there was no compulsion or sense of duty that forced Jeremiah to make the purchase; it was totally against common sense for him to have done so.

Thus, it seems exceedingly doubtful that there was a concern for family preservation or an olive branch for Jeremiah among Hanamel's motivations. He is cutting his losses for a bag of silver, and taking advantage of Jeremiah by doing so.¹⁰⁵

'And I knew that his was the word of YHWH.' Fretheim (2002:468) suggests that Jeremiah's comment, 'And I knew that his was the word of YHWH,' indicates that Jeremiah may have at times been in doubt about the source of the messages that he received. Lundbom (2004:506) also claims that it was an occasion on which the word of YHWH 'needed confirmation by subsequent events'. I do not believe that this is the intent of this phrase¹⁰⁶ and I concur with McKane (1996:839f), who says of such thinking:

'The representation that a word of YHWH only acquires certitude or attains validity when its prediction eventuates... is not easily reconcilable with the status which is claimed by a prophet for דבר יהוה when he is proclaiming it.'

I do not think that doubt about the source of the premonition is implicit in Jeremiah's statement, not least because passages such as Jeremiah 20:9 indicate that receiving a word from YHWH was not an experience about which he was typically in doubt. Rather, it seems to me that Hanamel's request borders on being unscrupulous. Whereas a businessman would dismiss it with the contempt that it

¹⁰⁵ He may not have minded the risk of insulting Jeremiah, or manipulating him with hints of legal duty, because Jeremiah was not exactly a valued relative. The Anathoth family had previously nursed an interest in killing him (11:18-23).

¹⁰⁶ Lundbom's support for this view is unconvincing. He claims Genesis 24:1-27 and 1Samuel 10:2-10 in support for his claim, but in neither text is there a relevant parallel. In the Genesis text, the chief servant (who is finding a wife for Isaac) is the one who asks for the sequence of events to occur as a sign, and *he* sets the terms; he does not receive them by revelation. They are confirmed as a sign of God's favour precisely because God does *the servant's* bidding. In the second text, Samuel directs Saul with a specific set of instructions by which Saul will be shown that he has been chosen and anointed. Samuel does not doubt that YHWH will complete what He has given Samuel to say. Saul may require the confirmation, but this would no longer represent a parallel to Jeremiah. If anything, the latter passage confirms the opposite of Lundbom's claim, because it demonstrates the prophet speaking with certainty, and God carrying out His word completely, giving no cause for doubt. God's revelation required confirmation only in the sense that He needed to bring about what He said would happen, but this is no less true of any prophetic word about the future.

deserves, Jeremiah realises that there is a prophetic message in the act of purchase itself. In other words, he was not previously in doubt that God had spoken; he is merely reiterating to his hearer that it was God's will for him to honour Hanamel's brazen offer, when all good sense militates against that decision.

[9]

Verses 9-12 recount the legalities of the transaction in painstaking detail. It is not possible to tell whether the seventeen shekels paid was much or little, seeing as there is nothing similar for comparison.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the point of mentioning the figure is surely to emphasise that the transaction was completed and fully paid up.

Such detail underlines the seriousness with which this purchase was being taken; it wasn't a vain pledge to buy that could be reversed or later denied. If we are correct that verse 8 indicates that Jeremiah understood prophetic meaning in the land transaction, surely the fastidiousness with which he adhered to purchase laws was meant to symbolise the commitment that God had to His promises bring back His people and to restore His land fully.

[10-12]

Verse 11 contains the contested phrase: 'the commandment and statutes' (see translation note above). McKane (1996:840) and Keown *et al* (1995:143, 154) advocate that the phrase serves to reinforce that Jeremiah followed all the formal legal requirements; they include also Rudolph's suggestion that a preposition ought to be inserted and the phrase moved to the end of verse 10, so that it reads 'according to the command and the statutes'; and Keown adds Holladay's suggestion that this is a technical term drawing attention to additional clauses in the sealed copy that are not in the open copy.

Lundbom (2004:507f) confirms that Aramaic deeds recovered from Elephantine are not written in duplicate, but it is the sealed part of the document that contains all of the terms of the agreement (yet not all deeds broadly from that time and place conform to this pattern). Thus, the phrase may serve this technical function, that is, of referring to the legal terms and conditions contained within (at least) the sealed part of the document.

¹⁰⁷ Keown *et al* (1995:153f) note that the purchase price was relatively low in comparison with David's 50 shekel purchase of Araunah's threshing floor or Menahem's tribute tax also of 50 shekels. But Lundbom (2004:507) points out that we do not know how much land was sold, and even the value of the shekel changed over time. Lundbom suspects it would be market value (albeit depreciated), but this still presumably would have been a lot of money for land occupied by Babylon.

However, given that the phrase renders ‘commandment’ in the singular and ‘statutes’ in the plural, there may be a deeper reason for its inclusion. As we saw in the previous chapter on Deuteronomy 6, this is a characteristic phrase describing that covenant document. Lundbom (2004:508) calls it ‘a stereotyped phrase in Deuteronomy’, although its meaning, he says, has been under dispute since antiquity. Some have taken the singular to refer to ‘the law’ and the plural to ‘custom’ (as it is translated in the KJV). Others render it something like ‘terms and conditions’ – the technical sense (so RSV, NIV, etc.).

I think that it is clear that the simple reference is to the terms and conditions of the deed of sale. However, its characteristically Deuteronomic form should cause us also to treat it as an allusion back to the covenant. If this is the case, the intention in drawing this connection is to invite comparison between Jeremiah’s ‘covenant’ with Hanamel and God’s covenant with His people.

Comparisons would include the following:

Firstly, the act of covenant making between Jeremiah and Hanamel signals God’s intention to maintain covenant relationship with His nation; it almost certainly parallels the promise of a new covenant that occupies the latter verses of this chapter. However, connecting the land transaction to *Deuteronomy* by allusion puts this new covenant in continuity with the old. The fact that the scroll concerns the inheritance of the *Promised Land* reinforces the idea that God intends for His covenantal dealings – even the promises made to Abram – to be resumed. It is a note of hope that relationship with His people in His land has not been broken off entirely.

Secondly, the fastidiousness with which the transaction was completed may not only intend to show that Jeremiah may not retreat from the deal. It possibly also parallels the faithfulness with which God had kept the covenant with His people. The reference back to Deuteronomy is a reminder that God is faithful to His covenant, providing both a reassurance that God intends to bring about His promised blessings, and an explanation for the state of curse that Judah must experience first.

Thirdly, Hanamel appears to be an entirely undeserving recipient of Jeremiah’s help. Jeremiah’s kin had already shown themselves unfaithful to him, and if anyone needed family help, surely it is the man in prison. For Hanamel to ask a man in captivity to provide him with redemption is ironic. Worse still, the circumstances under which this transaction takes place make it a terrible piece of business for Jeremiah. Nevertheless, Jeremiah acts in grace in spite of this. Similarly, Israel had behaved faithlessly towards the covenant and had no reason to expect God to act favourably towards them. This sign-act demonstrates God’s intention to do so regardless.

[13-14]

In verse 14, Jeremiah's command to Baruch to preserve the scroll of purchase in a clay jar is presented as a word from YHWH. McKane (1996:840f) argues that this oracle formula should be deleted (it doesn't appear in the LXX). He says:

'The entire formula at the beginning of v.14 ... is inappropriate, since speech of YHWH does not come until v.15 (so Volz, Rudolph, Weiser, Bright).'

It is not made clear why Jeremiah could not be reporting an oracle of YHWH in verse 14 *as well as* further revelation in verse 15f. The content of the oracle in verse 14 is undoubtedly of integral importance to understanding the sign, and nothing up to this point has been of Jeremiah's instigation. In the terms of the story, he understands that he is acting symbolically, but he doesn't fully understand why. It would be hard to explain Jeremiah's command here (or his prayer of confusion to follow) if the word to preserve the document had not come from YHWH.

Lundbom (2002:501) recognises the centrality of this oracle to the meaning of the chapter¹⁰⁸ and strongly opposes those who delete the oracle formula. He says of McKane and his list of commentators that they have 'failed to recognise v14 as a separate oracle' and that there is 'no warrant for this deletion'.

There is clearly significance in what the Lord commands here. Baruch is ordered to put the deeds in a clay pot¹⁰⁹ so that they may be preserved for a long time. This is the crowning display of certainty in God's promise to restore the land. The deed is not to be treated in a manner commensurate with its actual worthlessness, but rather as an object of value that the owner intends to claim. Jeremiah is to appear certain (at least symbolically) that he will take possession of his inheritance.

Secondly, the *need* for preservation for a long time may mean to indicate that the promised redemption and restoration of the land that the deed symbolises will only take place after a lengthy period of punishment. The restoration will come, but they should not expect it quickly.

¹⁰⁸ In his view of the passage structure, when verse 14 is read as a separate oracle, as it is in the MT version, it completes a symmetrical pattern of oracles: two of judgement, two of salvation; two more of judgement, and two more of salvation. There is no compulsion to accept verse 14 as a separate oracle on the basis of perceived symmetry; the pattern may be mis-analysed, or getting so near to symmetry may have been a felicitous accident on the part of the author. Nevertheless, it remains a strong argument in favour of verse 14 as an oracle.

¹⁰⁹ Keown *et al* (1995:155) point out that both scroll and clay pot feature as sign-acts in Jeremiah: a pot is destroyed in 19:10 to signify the smashing of 'this nation', and a scroll is destroyed in 51:63 as a sign of the destruction of Babylon. Here the two are joined as a sign of hope. This is an interesting observation, but I can see no clues in the text that the author himself understands these other sign-acts to be related to this one. It seems to me to be coincidental.

[15]

Verse 15 supplies YHWH's interpretation of Jeremiah's enacted parable. Jeremiah's purchase of family land parallels the restoration of economic activity for God's people. It is not the end of the covenant; God intends to return His people to the place of blessing. The punishment is temporary.

Keown *et al* (1995:155) point out that the restoration of *this type* of economic activity is a mixed blessing. Seeing as the transfer and redemption of property tended to be related to the loss of land due to slavery, this 'reassurance' is tantamount to promising that they will return to the same problems of poverty, slavery, and the like, or else indicating that the returnees would need to redeem their property from whomever had occupied it in their absence. This is probably not the intention, not least because the text makes nothing more of it. Fretheim (2002:458) says,

'The symbolism associated with the act includes houses and vineyards, and commercial activity related thereto, so that a field is but a sign of a much more comprehensive future reality.'

He adds that the need to *purchase* land has to do with peaceful reappropriation, as opposed to the need for a second violent Conquest. This I think is much more to the point. The emphasis is clearly upon the restarting of economic life after a period of cessation (cf. Brueggemann, 1998:302),¹¹⁰ and possibly also upon the symbolic value of the re-buying of the land: Jeremiah's redemption of worthless land parallels YHWH's plan to redeem the whole land once more. There is not a suggestion here of return to problematic social conditions, but of positively of restoration.

[16-18]

McKane (1996:842), following Thiel, claims that there is an 'unconvincing junction' of Jeremiah's prayer to the preceding account of the purchase. This motivates the contention that verses 16-25 are a later explanatory expansion. He provides no objective reasoning for his lack of conviction nor any physical evidence that these two sections were at some point separated – and he suggests no interpretive gain from observing his division – and so his feelings on this matter should be disregarded. It seems more profitable to account for its current conjunction than to whimsically claim its separation.

The junction between sections is not nearly as untidy as he makes out. It is true that the prayer contains hymnic elements and Deuteronomic language that some regard as late developments, but there is no reason why these elements should necessarily have originated later nor why they could not have been part of the prophet's repertoire.

¹¹⁰ He points out that this is the clear implication of the adverb 'again'.

However, Jeremiah's prayer is actually a reasonable response to the events that had just unfolded. YHWH's orchestration of this purchase was strange and demanded explanation. Verse 15 had sounded a note of hope, but hope was to be stored in an earthenware jar until a later date. For the meantime, Nebuchadnezzar is outside the city walls and the horrors of God's judgement are descending upon the city. The typical message that Jeremiah had been preaching until this point had been one of doom. The hopeful nature of his recent sign-act required explanation.

Thus Jeremiah's prayer – although full of praise and exaltation for God's greatness – begins with an expression of woe, an expression that Allen (2008:368) points out is a common note of protest in the book (e.g. 1:6; 4:10; 14:13). Jeremiah is complaining about the confusing message of hope that he had just enacted, which seemed more in keeping with the false preaching of the prophets of *shalom*.

In the view of Babylon's presence and the prophetic message that confirms their immanent exile, Jeremiah here affirms God's power and sovereignty. Jeremiah refers to the instrument of God's creating as His 'outstretched arm', which McKane (1996:843) notes is an 'unsuitable' description of creation activity, but is meant to call to mind the acts of deliverance with which it is usually associated. This reinforces the idea that as Creator, YHWH is not lacking in the power to also act as deliverer and to repel the might of the enemy. Thus verse 18 supplies the appropriate title:¹¹¹ YHWH of hosts, the Lord over armies. For economic activity to be restored to the land, YHWH would need to put an end to the Babylonian assault. Jeremiah acknowledges here that God is Creator, deliverer, and the Lord of war: He is capable of bringing about the outcome of His choosing. Nothing is too difficult for Him.

[19]

'Your eyes are opened upon all the ways of the sons of Adam...' From verse 19, Jeremiah recounts God's just dealings with His people. His counsel and works are good because the God who created with His outstretched arm also sees without hindrance. He is a ruler of justice because nothing is hidden from His sight.

The text speaks of humankind as 'the sons of אָדָם', which refers either to mankind collectively, or possibly to the proper name Adam. Seeing as Jeremiah's prayer is to begin a brief retelling of God's

¹¹¹ This title is phrased in the 3rd person, breaking from Jeremiah's direct address of YHWH. It is also not included in the LXX, say Keown *et al* (1995:143), noting that it is typical of the MT to add titles. They add (1995:148) that Crenshaw's form-critical study of this title locates its usage primarily after the exile in expressions of faith in YHWH that He is sovereign in spite of the defeat of His people and destruction of His temple. Here it certainly expresses God's sovereignty – even His military power – over the invading army. Thus, although the title may be an editor's interjection into Jeremiah's prayer, it is a recognition of the military backdrop to Jeremiah's words.

dealing with His people, it would be appropriate to speak of humankind in connection with our first ancestor. This is especially so because the focus of Jeremiah's history is upon human unworthiness of God's kindness. Therefore, to say that God's eyes are open upon the ways of the sons of *Adam* is to offer a reminder that all are sons of disobedience.

The assertion thereafter that YHWH gives to all according to the fruit of their works is therefore not a reassurance. Our common father was expelled from Eden for his rebellion, and as Jeremiah spoke, the sword was again at the gate of God's chosen territory.

[20]

'*You made for yourself a name as this day.*' If humankind bears the name of their father Adam, the first rebel, verse 20 offers God's great name as a contrast. Keown *et al* (1995:156) identify Nehemiah 9:10 as a counterpart of verse 20. It reads:

'[You] performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day.' (ESV)

Both passages recount Israel's history, mentioning signs and wonders in Egypt, and the unusual idea of God making a name for Himself. The phrase 'until this day' probably means that the signs and wonders that God performed were still being spoken about (cf. McKane, 1996:844), rather than that there was on-going miraculous activity, which makes good sense of its connection with God 'making a name for Himself', that is, building His fame.

Jeremiah's prayer differs from Nehemiah's in that it expands the scope of God's self-revelation from signs given in Egypt and Israel to signs also given to humankind more broadly. This difference serves perhaps to draw attention again to Jeremiah's concern with God's sovereignty beyond Israel's borders, and thus even over the invading Babylonians. The God who gives blessing and judgement – who gives to mankind according to the fruit of his works – does so for *all* people.

[21-22]

Although the language of covenant is not explicit in Jeremiah's prayer, it is clear that the Deuteronomic covenant underlies these verses. There are vague references to the commandments in verse 23 and 'what you spoke' in verse 24, which both might be meant as what was spoken *in the covenant*, but concrete connection is made by means of strong reiteration of the language of

Deuteronomy. Jeremiah's words have a close relationship to texts scattered though Deuteronomy 6, and an even tighter relationship to Deuteronomy 26:8-9.¹¹² See the table below:

Table 4.1: Similarities between Jeremiah 32 and Deuteronomy 26 and 6

Jeremiah 32	Deuteronomy 26	Deuteronomy 6
וַתֵּצֵא אֶת־עַמְּךָ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאִתּוֹת וּבִמּוֹפְתִים וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְאִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָא גָדוֹל׃	וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה וּבְמִרְא גָדֹל וּבְאִתּוֹת וּבִמּוֹפְתִים׃	וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה׃ וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים גְּדֹלִים וְרַעִים בְּמִצְרַיִם׃
21 And you brought out your people Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and wonders and a mighty hand and with the arm outstretched and with great fear	8 And YHWH brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an arm outstretched, with great fear, with signs and wonders.	21-22 And YHWH brought us out from Egypt with a mighty hand; And YHWH gave signs and wonders great and grave upon Egypt
וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתָם לָתֵת לָהֶם׃	9 וַיְבִאֵנוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן־לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת׃	לָתֵת לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ׃
22 And you gave to them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give to them,	9a And he brought us into this place and gave us this land,	23 to give to us the land that he swore to our fathers
אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ׃	אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ׃	אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ׃
22b (It is) a land flowing with milk and honey	9b (It is) a land flowing with milk and honey	3b: (It is) a land flowing with milk and honey

There seems therefore to be direct reliance upon key covenantal texts in Jeremiah's retelling of God's dealings with Israel. Throughout Jeremiah's prayer and in God's response that follows, Deuteronomic language is prominent.¹¹³

[23]

'And they went and took possession of it.' The story of God's dealings with Israel ends with the verb יָרַשׁ, which Keown *et al* (1995:157) translate as 'to take possession, inherit', and about which they point out that it implies Israel gained the land by God's initiative, not theirs. Inheritances are not earned or sought out, they are given.

¹¹² Lundbom (2004:513) adds Deuteronomy 4:34, which is a near parallel to Jeremiah 32:21.

¹¹³ This means either that this chapter was radically re-edited by a Deuteronomist, or that Jeremiah himself had knowledge of Deuteronomy (or a version thereof). I prefer the latter, because this section of the book is so saturated with the language of Deuteronomy that I suspect extracting the Deuteronomist would also eradicate the meaning. It is beyond the scope of this canonically based study to examine my suspicions any further.

Jeremiah proceeds to describe Israel's response to God's redemption and generosity. Here again there is repetition of Deuteronomic language and ideas. The 'evil' that comes upon Israel in Jeremiah's time he attributes to their failure to hear God's voice, to walk according to His law, or to do what God commanded. These ideas are pervasive in Deuteronomy. For example, failure to hear YHWH's voice and walking after other gods are both offered in 8:19-20 as reasons that God would cause the nation to perish:

And if you forget the LORD your God and go [i.e. 'walk'] after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 8:19-20, ESV)

Deuteronomy also repeats the command to 'hear' as a signature exhortation of that covenant. Here in Jeremiah 32:23 there is a repetition of vocal ideas that cements the connection between Israel's failure to heed the covenant and her punishment: Jeremiah says that Israel 'did not hear your voice', and therefore that voice calls on destruction, and the punisher *does* hear and obey. Thus in verse 24, it is the Chaldeans who emerge as the ones answering that call.

So, although Jeremiah's prayer leaves out direct mention of the covenant, he is nevertheless clearly arguing that it is Israel's inability to hear the covenant that is responsible for their immanent defeat.

Brueggemann (1998:304) adds that the verses 23b-24 are 'a programmatic lawsuit statement, offering a rationale for the Exile'. This is YHWH's indictment upon covenant breakers, and it reinforces the earlier contention that although Jeremiah is facing charges, his response to them asserts rather that it is YHWH who is bringing judgement upon the judges.

[24]

Verse 24 contains a triad of curses: 'sword, famine, and pestilence', and in this passage, it is the Chaldeans who wield these curses as a weapon. McKane (1996:845) calls this triad 'unskillfully attached to what precedes', which is a claim that deserves some examination, as it speaks to the integrity of the text.

The triad is a favourite expression of Jeremiah's, appearing 16 times, but in the remainder of the Old Testament it only appears in exactly this way twice, in Ezekiel 6:11 and 12:16.¹¹⁴ Although not taking

¹¹⁴ There is very close repetition if one takes the apparent tetrad of 2 Chronicles 20:9 ('If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house...') to be a triad by regarding 'the sword, judgement' to be a single epexegetical construction equivalent to 'the sword of judgement'.

this stereotypical form, a number of passages¹¹⁵ descriptive of God's judgements are framed using some or all of these three categories, which would suggest that Jeremiah's triad at least summarises a *typical characterisation* of judgement in scripture more generally.

Ezekiel is additionally noteworthy, however, because one significant passage lists a *tetrad* of principal curses,¹¹⁶ not a triad. It reads:

'For thus says the Lord GOD: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence...' (Ezekiel 14:21, ESV)

Given that biblical descriptions of judgement commonly include two or more of these *four* categories, Ezekiel's tetrad could be regarded as a more complete stereotypical summary of curse. All four appear in expanded form in Leviticus 26:14-33. Jeremiah may have preferred the triadic version on account of Deuteronomy 28, which also neglects wild beasts among its curses.¹¹⁷

In terms of the meaning of the triad, it is clear in the majority of cases that these are specifically *divine acts* of judgement, and they are seemingly chosen to signify a reversal of the Exodus of Egypt, in which God was the warrior and these His weapons of war. Deuteronomy 28 makes this clear:¹¹⁸

'The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt...' (28:27, ESV)
'And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt...' (28:60, ESV)
'And the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.' (28:68, ESV)

Jeremiah's usage of this judgement stereotype in chapter 32 is fairly strange because he speaks of the three as though wielded by Babylon. Yet certain texts explain why it is appropriate to speak of these three judgement types in connection with siege. Ezekiel 7:15 is a clear example:

The sword is without; pestilence and famine are within. He who is in the field dies by the sword, and him who is in the city famine and pestilence devour. (ESV)

Thus, in Jeremiah 32:24 the reference to Babylon fighting against the city by sword and famine and pestilence carries with it the connotation of God as divine warrior warring against His own people. It suggests that the Babylonians are merely the agents of God's warfare to reverse the Exodus and

¹¹⁵ 2 Samuel 24:13; 1 Kings 8:37; 1 Chronicles 21:12; 2 Chronicles 6:28; Ezekiel 5:12; Ezekiel 6:12; Ezekiel 7:15.

¹¹⁶ The tetrad appears in expanded form also in Ezekiel 5:17.

¹¹⁷ However, Jeremiah 15:1-4 quotes the triad only to add 'four destroyers', namely the sword, dogs, birds, and other wild beasts. So he does acknowledge the fourth judgement type in spite of sticking with the triadic stereotype.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Exodus 5:3; Amos 4:10.

Conquest that brought Israel into the land, and the weapons with which they fight are the judgement-curses of YHWH Himself.

Thus there may be a sense of syntactical clumsiness in the deployment of this stereotypical phrase, but because of the richness of the connotations that adhere to it, it enables Jeremiah to communicate theological wealth by economical means. Thus one man's 'unskilful attachment' is another man's 'artful rhetoric'.

'*What you spoke has come to be*'. Verse 24 ends Jeremiah's brief historical fly-over with him pointing out to YHWH that He can see with His own eyes that the promised curses are taking place. Jeremiah has recounted Israel's failure to obey their gracious God as an *apologia* for the judgement that was deservedly falling. However, it is not judgement that bothers Jeremiah, but hope. The sign-act suggests to Jeremiah that God has had a change of heart.

[25]

Verse 25 expresses Jeremiah's incredulity that he has been instructed to purchase land in the midst of Babylon's sacking of Jerusalem and occupation of the land. Scholars differ as to how one is to understand this point of doubt upon which he ends his prayer. Firstly, because the doubt about the reasons for requiring the purchase of the land appear after the transaction is complete, many commentators argue that this chapter is recounted out of sequence. Keown *et al* (1995:147) say,

'[The passage] would seem to fit logically immediately after Hanamel's speech in v8. Having asked for and heard the explanation, Jeremiah would acknowledge that the LORD was behind it (v8b) and would carry out the command.'

They also cite Rudolph, who argues that little of this portion belongs to Jeremiah's original prayer, and that this is evidence of the prophet succumbing to 'typical human doubt'; and Nicholson and Thiel who argue that this is all the later addition of Deuteronomistic editors who refrained from disrupting the original passage.

The sequence of events is not so strange though. While it would be good business sense for Jeremiah to query God's the reasons before agreeing to the purchase, for a prophet of YHWH to be seen to insist on an explanation before obeying may have communicated an improper order of relationship. There is nothing illogical in the prophet obeying YHWH's command first and seeking explanation for it after.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ At Jeremiah's commissioning, YHWH gives him the task of delivering whatever it is that YHWH gives him to speak. ('But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command

Is it a matter of doubt then? His prayer suggests no. He acknowledges God's ability to bring about any outcome; he is fully convinced that the Creator-redeemer is capable of repelling the Babylonians or shortening the exile. But he seems unable to see how the message of hope implied by the sign-act is not 'fundamentally inconsistent' with God's previous words of judgement (Allen, 2008:368). Keown *et al* (1995:149) point out that Jeremiah's prayer here is following a typical form that would ordinarily include a petition for deliverance. This is absent from Jeremiah's prayer presumably reflecting his certainty that no deliverance was planned, as YHWH had told him previously. Redeeming Hanamel's land would only have made sense if there was a chance that the enemy would be repelled, and Jeremiah knew that YHWH was not supposed to let this happen.

To reiterate what this story has communicated up to this point: Hanamel appears to have been using kinsman-redeemer traditions to compel Jeremiah to give him cash value for land in (or about to be in) the possession of the Babylonians. It is questionable that Jeremiah's redemption of it would have made any difference – given that the Babylonians were not duty-bound to honour title deeds, the land would not have been any more or less intact if the deed had Jeremiah's name on it or Hanamel's – but this is not the reason for his distress in verse 25. Retaining an interest in family real estate communicated confidence that there would be life after the Babylonian siege, and Jeremiah's preaching had been full of assurances that there would not, at least not for that generation. Jeremiah of all people was supposed to be the one who represented loss in confidence in the future of the land (as against the false prophets of *shalom* who predicted Babylonian failure and short exile).

The purchase of land was economically ill-advised and theologically questionable. Jeremiah is not in doubt; he just can't see how this new turn in his prophetic message is consistent with the old.¹²⁰

[26-27]

In verse 27, God responds asserting His universal dominion ('God of all flesh'), and using in question form words from Jeremiah's own prayer: 'Is anything too difficult for me?'

you, you shall speak.'" Jeremiah 1:7) It is reasonable to expect this immediacy of his actions as well as his words. It is highly unlikely that he would insist on understanding what he is commanded before he would obey.

¹²⁰ Perhaps this is overstating it. The book has delivered messages of hope previously (3:14ff; 16:15; 23:3-8; 24:5-7), so Jeremiah presumably isn't without *any* idea how God plans to bring about this restoration of economic activity in the land. Yet on the other hand, the New Covenant promises in chapter 31 appear earlier in the book, but may be chronologically later than chapters 32 and 33 (seeing that 31:4, 38 speaks of the rebuilding of the city, it may already have been destroyed; much of the chapter seems to treat the war as past tense). Thus it is not inconceivable that chapter 32 records one of the earliest messages of restoration even though there have been others before in the book.

Fretheim (2002:460-464) believes the answer to this question is 'yes', indicating that God *cannot* be faithful to His promises and also take a short-cut to their restored future. In other words, the thing that God cannot do is to violate His word. I think this is theologically true, and it does make sense of the remainder of God's response: punishment must come as promised, but restoration is also possible in the form of a new covenant. Nevertheless, I doubt that this is the point of this text. Nothing else in the text hints that God is appealing to the constraints on His power that are imposed by His character. On the contrary, the claim to be 'God of all flesh' suggests that it is indeed His universal sovereignty that is in view. The question most naturally assumes a 'no' answer.¹²¹

The essence of Jeremiah's complaint is that purchasing land would only make sense if the Chaldeans were to be thwarted in their attempted invasion, but this cuts against God's previous promises to punish Judah and send them into exile. What place did this message of hope have amidst the prophecies of doom that he had been called on to speak?

God's response is strange, because using Jeremiah's words to assert His supreme control would lead us to expect that He is *confirming* them. Yet His sovereignty is not to be directed at thwarting the Babylonians, as Jeremiah seemed to be suggesting.

However, Brueggemann (1998:303) points out that the question form of the words in YHWH's mouth was used famously in Genesis 18 in which barren Sarah is rebuked for her unbelief with the contention that the impossible is not impossible for God. This question in Jeremiah 32 certainly seems to carry the force of a rebuke too, and may therefore be intended in this way here. Jeremiah was right that nothing is impossible for YHWH, but he should know therefore that God is able to keep His promises, whether to show mercy or to repay the wicked. Both punishment and restoration are possible for Him. Just as Sarah's vision of God was too limited, so also is Jeremiah's.

If a tighter allusion to Genesis 18 is intended, the question may similarly make reference to God's power to bring new life from the dead. Just as the promise of a son was brought to life out of Sarah's old age and infertility, so also the promises of restoration will be brought to life out of the ashes of His city and covenant.

[28]

In verse 28, therefore, God explains what the consequences of His sovereignty will be. It is *because* YHWH has supreme control over all mankind that Babylon will succeed. God is able to use even a

¹²¹ This is also how it was intended in its most famous occurrence in Genesis 18. See below.

foreign nation as agents of His punishment. Thus the city will fall not in defiance of His control but because of it. But similarly, because YHWH has control, He is also able to return His nation to the Promised Land again. Judgement is not the last word.

[29]

Verses 29-35 present God's charges against Israel by way of explanation of their punishment.

In verse 29, the practice of setting fire to enemy positions during the latter stages of a siege is employed in an ironic condemnation of Israelite idolatry. Firstly, sacrificial fires could only be lit at the Lord's house, and so fire is a fittingly ironic punishment to visit upon those houses in which profane fires were lit (cf. Keown 1995:157). Secondly, the houses are described with specific mention of their roofs; this is because the word גג can mean either the roof of a house or the top of the altar of incense (Holladay, 1988:55). Thus each Israelite house that had played host to so much idolatry is pictured as an altar of incense with smoke pouring off of it. Not only is it an artfully ironic description, but it also reinforces that the Babylonian siege is direct recompense for Israel's rebellion.

[30-32]

In verses 30-32, YHWH expresses His anger for the comprehensive rebellion of His people. The language is extreme: all their actions are evil from youth.¹²² Everything they do is a provocation.¹²³ The city has been a source of anger since it was built. Evil has been perpetuated by royalty, government, clergy, prophets, the men of the countryside, the men of the city. There is a clear intention in these verses to include all time, all deeds, and all people. No age or group is spared from blame for the punishment that is falling.

[33-35]

Verses 33-35 move from comprehensive condemnation to specific examples of rebellion and idolatry that have provoked God's wrath. Lundbom (2005:517) describes the turning of one's back to another as 'body-language for showing contempt'. This attitude of rejection of YHWH seems in this

¹²² There may be a reminder here of God's verdict about humanity in the days of Noah:

כִּי יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רָע מִנְעֻרָיו
For the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth. (Genesis 8:21, ESV)

This would place Judah in the role of those under severest judgement, awaiting the deluge.

¹²³ This is how I would interpret 'the work of their hands' – as meaning all their deeds, everything they set their hands to – but Lundbom (2004:245, 516) argues that it may be a reference to the idols that their hands had made. He points out that it is a favourite Deuteronomic phrase, and it is used in both ways there. The generic, positive meaning (which I favour) appears for example in Deuteronomy 2:7, 14:29, and the disparaging connection to idolatry can be seen in 4:28, 31:29.

verse to be pictured within a familial relationship. Perhaps borrowing from Deuteronomy again, YHWH Himself occupies the role of faithful father who diligently teaches his sons. The sons of Judah, however, do not listen or take discipline, but turn their backs on Him. In the place of the intended relationship, with YHWH as Father God over a loving people, idolatry defiles the place that bears His name.¹²⁴

The list of sins culminates in the passing of children through the fire in order to entrust them to 'Molech'. Keown *et al* (1995:158f) briefly describe the scholarly discussion over what exactly is entailed in 'passing through to Molech', little of which is relevant for our purposes. They note that it is made clear in Jeremiah 7:31 and 19:5 that the death of the child was involved, and it also seems as though some practitioners believed that they were thereby worshipping YHWH.¹²⁵ This explains why in verse 35 YHWH so vehemently denies that He ever conceived of commanding such behaviour: the syncretistic behaviour of the day seems to have implicated Him in the request for the child sacrifice.

[36-37]

After a brief catalogue of their rebelliousness that justifies the judgement at the hand of Babylon, God's response changes tone. It takes the form of a disputation,¹²⁶ but strangely takes issue with the judgement that Jeremiah had ascribed to YHWH Himself in verse 24. In the same way that YHWH turned Jeremiah's true statement in verse 17 ('nothing is too difficult for you') back upon him seemingly as a rebuke, so also YHWH rebukes Jeremiah again with the words that He had given Jeremiah to preach.

The MT addresses YHWH's words to the plural 'you', not the singular that we might expect (and to which the LXX bears witness). If the plural reading is to be followed, it at least indicates a widening of the audience, firstly indicating a wider group who held the opinion that all was lost, but also therefore addressing the wider group who would receive God's promises (cf. Keown *et al*, 1995:159).

¹²⁴ Keown *et al* (1995:158) suggest that the turning of backs to God may be making particular reference to the false worship of the people. They cite Ezekiel 8:16, which describes 25 men attending the temple precinct, but turning their backs to the temple and bowing to the sun, in contrast with Daniel who even in exile prayed facing Jerusalem. Seeing as verse 33 pictures God as a father and Israel as a disobedient son, I prefer to see this as a generalised description of the dishonourable behaviour of a rebellious 'child'. Nevertheless, Keown's suggestion is appreciated for making the imagery more concrete, even if it is not the precise intention of the phrase.

¹²⁵ Keown suggests that it may perhaps have been seen as an extension of the dedication of the firstborn (as Ezekiel 20:25-26 seems to suggest).

¹²⁶ Disputations are commonly in the form 'You say... but this is what the Lord says...' (Keown *et al*, 1995:159). Despite the irregular form, this is how YHWH's speech functions here.

It is likely with this pessimism about the nation's future that YHWH takes issue. The disputed statement about the fate of the city is not incorrect (it is a statement derived from God's promise to destroy the city, after all); it belongs to the contested human side of the disputation because it is *inadequate* as it stands. It is only half the true picture. God proclaims that there is indeed hope, not of deliverance from Babylon, but of future restoration. God promises that they will return and dwell in 'safety' (בטח).

Excursus: meaning and usage of בטח

בטח refers predominantly to bodily safety or a sense of security; it is the state of being without enemies. This is evident for example in the following passage:

‘They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid.’ (Ezekiel 34:28, ESV; cf. 39:26)

It is used similarly also in Deuteronomy 12:10; 1 Samuel 12:11; Psalms 78:53; Proverbs 1:33; and Zechariah 14:11.

However, בטח is also used in close association with ideas more directly related to prosperity, such as the enjoyment of the richness of the land. This can be seen, for example, in the following passage:

Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely. (Leviticus 25:18-19, ESV)

בטח need not be seen as synonymous with ‘eating your fill’, but there is a connection between safety and fullness – enjoyment of the fruitfulness of the land – that is regularly drawn. It can be clearly observed in Leviticus 26:5; Deuteronomy 33:28; 1 Kings 4:25; and Isaiah 14:30. Two passages in Ezekiel combine the two senses (i.e. safety from threat and security to enjoy prosperity):

And they shall dwell securely in it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely, when I execute judgments upon all their neighbours who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God." (Ezekiel 28:26, ESV)

And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. (Ezekiel 34:27, ESV)

These passages in Ezekiel may explain the connection between safety and prosperity, namely that one is free to cultivate the land and enjoy its fruit only when one is free from the fear and oppression of one's enemies. War is an obvious obstacle to prosperity that must be dealt with before more comprehensive states of peace and goodness can be enjoyed.

And finally, there is a refrain in Jeremiah that makes use of this term:

In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' (Jeremiah 23:6, ESV)

In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' (Jeremiah 33:16, ESV)

'Dwelling securely' describes life in God's restored city under David's restored dynasty; in this way, conditions of salvation from enemies, rest, and right relationship with YHWH are all drawn into association with בִּטְחָא.

.....

Thus, YHWH's promise that Jerusalem would be restored and that the returnees would live in a state of בִּטְחָא would have stood as the direct opposite to the conditions in which Jeremiah's people were then living. They were under attack and therefore either experiencing the deep deprivation of siege, or making preparations for those desperate conditions.

In the face of the hopelessness that the people were expressing in verse 36, God promises an end to the fear of enemies and the insecurity and lack associated with war.

[38]

'And they shall be to me a people, and I shall be to them God.' In verse 38, God reiterates the definitive statement of covenant relationship, often repeated in the Old Testament¹²⁷ and indeed in the New. This demonstrates that although the people have broken the covenant to such a degree that their expulsion is required, nevertheless God does not intend to revoke the covenant itself.

Keown *et al* (1995:160) point out that there is no condition of obedience attached to this covenant statement, as there is in the original form reported in Jeremiah 7:23a ('But this command I gave them: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people"', ESV). This renewal of the covenant will surpass the old, because God Himself will provide the means of sustaining it.

[39]

Verse 39 reiterates God's virtually unilateral role in the new covenant, returning once again to themes from Deuteronomy 6. Whereas Deuteronomy required Israel to love and follow God from the heart, here God Himself promises to give to his people the capacity to fear Him that had always

¹²⁷ It is implicit in the call of Abram, and explicit, for example, in Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:7; Deuteronomy 29:13.

been lacking. This will result in the receipt of His blessing, to them and to their children, as He had promised to Abram.

[40-41]

Chapter 32 contains many hints of future restoration, but here in verse 40 the basis of this restoration is given: the establishment of a new covenant. Lundbom (2004:519) points out that the Sinai covenant was never guaranteed to be eternal, and it now lay broken. The New Covenant is eternal and without conditions. It determines to remove the problem of ‘turning away’ that had disrupted the divine-human relationship in the past and threatened blessing.

In this covenant, there is unqualified, comprehensive good offered to His people, with God planting them in the land unreservedly. The former covenant offered blessing of this order too, but the corresponding list of curses necessary in the Mosaic covenant are absent from this one. The rebellion that threatened the first covenant is no longer to be a problem in the New Covenant.

Verses 40 and 41 are each parallelisms, and they also seem to share a relationship to each other:

40a I will cut with them an eternal covenant, that I will not turn away from after them to do good to them.	41a I will rejoice to do good to them,
40b And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, in order that they do not turn aside from (after) me.	41b and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

In 40a, God commits to an eternal covenant of blessing, and in 40b there is a corresponding commitment to supply what is needed in order that people can keep that eternal covenant too. In 41a the parallelism concerns the commitment to do good again, but the second line this time has to do with the content of His good will: irrevocable planting of His people in the land. This places the Promised Land at the centre of God’s good will, where it stands again as a summary statement of God’s promises of future blessing. To enjoy God’s goodness, one must be planted there.

There may also be an intended relationship between the two verses, because 41a seems to reiterate 40a in summary form. Verses 40b and 41b are thematically similar too, with each containing an assurance of faithfulness: firstly that of the people of Jerusalem, who will fear from the heart so that they never turn away; secondly, that of YHWH Himself, who promises to restore the people to the land ‘with all my heart and all my soul’. Lundbom (2004:521) points out that this language is only used of YHWH this one time; it normally is used of human commitment to YHWH, not the other way around (cf. Deuteronomy 4:29; 6:5 etc.). Divorced from its context, this statement could be taken to imply that God was somehow equivocal or uncommitted to His covenant, or that His prior deeds

were less than faithful. This statement is more sensible when viewed in terms of its relationship to verse 40; as counter-point to the previous verse, 41b is saying that in the New Covenant, just as God's people will never again turn from Him, so He will never need to uproot them in anger again. He will be able to plant them permanently without fear of having to retract His promise because the relationship between God and His people will be from the heart and untarnishable.

It is not made clear how the covenant will come into being or bring the promises about, but it is at least significant that this covenant again connects blessing with the Promised Land such that being pursued by God's unrelenting generosity and being planted in the land are broadly synonymous, and it also makes it very clear that the reason for confidence in this covenant is the perfection of relationship between God and man. Sin and rebellion are no longer to be a threat to peace with God.

[42]

Verse 42 claims that God's role in bringing evil upon His people is a basis for certainty that He will bring about His promises. It is a reassurance that although God's covenant curses are real and being enacted, they do not nullify His promises. In fact, the seriousness with which God treats His curses is a guarantee in a sense that He will also regard His promises seriously.

[43-44]

Verse 43 reports a second popular statement of hopelessness with regard to the future of Jerusalem, which while true is also inadequate. In response to the people's lament that the land is a desolation, YHWH brings to mind Jeremiah's sign-act: the land may well be condemned and given over to the Chaldeans, but the last word has not been said. Desolation will be followed by restoration. Their fortunes will be restored. Jeremiah's redemption of his family land illustrates God's intention to be the redeemer of the whole land once again.

4.2.2 Structure

Structurally, this chapter divides easily into four major sections:

- 1-5 Zedekiah's charges against Jeremiah
- 6-14 Jeremiah's response 1: The redemption of a field
- 15-25 Jeremiah's response 2: Jeremiah's prayer
- 26-44 Jeremiah's response 3: YHWH's answer

In support of these as the clear structural divisions, Fretheim (2002:454) notes that 'each of the major segments of the chapter concludes with a reference to the land purchase.' This is a helpful

observation; strangely, however, he feels it necessary for this to be true also of the first section, and thus he argues that verses 6-8 somehow function as the conclusion to the accusation of treason in verses 3-5. This is extremely hard to agree with, and unnecessarily rigid. Zedekiah's words form the most self-evidently discrete section in the chapter, seeing as everything else is Jeremiah's response. The land-purchase motif is a sensible way of dividing Jeremiah's speech, but not needed (or logical) in the case of 1-5.

More detailed divisions are open to more variation of opinion. Keown *et al* (2002:145) divide the purchase of the field into report of purchase (6-9) and report of sign-act (10-15). I would be hesitant to advocate this division, because the sign-act surely includes the purchase and not merely the 'preservation of the deed' as their summary line would have it.

Lundbom (2002:501) has identified interesting symmetry in the passage that speaks of a careful unity to the argument of the chapter. He says,

'Attempts to show sources or redaction in the chapter must be judged unsuccessful; the same goes for attempts to date portions of the chapter in the postexilic period. While it is clear that the narrative and the oracles are brought together here by a compiler... it is just as clear that the chapter contains a structure that has gone unrecognised by those dividing it into sources. The chapter, to be read properly, must be seen as a unified composition.'

His structure points out that there is a correspondence between the number and content of the oracles either side of Jeremiah's prayer. He has analysed the chapter as follows:

- Superscription 1
- Narrative and prior oracles to Zedekiah 2-5
 - Oracle I – Judgement on Zedekiah 3b-4
 - Oracle II – Judgement on Zedekiah 5
- Narrative and oracles on the field purchase 6-15
 - Oracle III – Salvation for the nation 14
 - Oracle IV – Salvation for the nation 15
- Jeremiah's prayer to YHWH 16-25
- YHWH's answer to Jeremiah 26-44
 - Oracle V – Judgement on the nation 26-29
 - Oracle VI – Judgement on the nation 30-35
 - Oracle VII – Salvation for the nation 36-41
 - Oracle VIII – Salvation for the nation 42-44

The oracles of salvation are easily separable in the way indicated, because each is introduced with the 'Thus says YHWH' formula. The divisions between oracles of judgement are a little less clear, seemingly separated on the grounds that there is a slight shift in theme and that the divine name is at least invoked again (albeit not in the typical way).

Oracle I has to do with his defeat and meeting with Nebuchadnezzar, and Oracle II with his deportation to Babylon and subsequent death. Oracle V contains God's promises to mete out punishment through the agency of Babylon, and Oracle VI contains the reasons for that punishment. The shifts are slight, but defensible.

I would marginally prefer to leave the judgement oracles undivided, as follows:

- Oracle I: Judgement (3-5)
- Oracle II: Salvation (14)
- Oracle III: Salvation (15)
- Oracle IV: Judgement (26-35)
- Oracle V: Salvation (36-41)
- Oracle VI: Salvation (42-44)

The symmetry of the structure is less impressive this way, but at least it is far easier to defend, seeing that under this division now each of these oracles begins with the 'Thus says YHWH' formula.

4.2.3 Synopsis

The oracles in chapter 32 are given in the context of Jeremiah's imprisonment by King Zedekiah, and particularly the king's accusations that Jeremiah's preaching of judgement was disloyal to king and country. The account of the transaction between Jeremiah and Hanamel, the prayer, and YHWH's answer are all narrated by Jeremiah in response to this context.

Fretheim (2002:471) points out that Jeremiah's captivity in chapters 32 and 33 reveals 'a fundamental irony; God's words about freedom and spaciousness are voiced in the midst of restriction and confinement. Jeremiah's life situation thus symbolises that of the exilic readers.' Thus the setting of these oracles also contributes to the meaning of the signs and promises that are spoken in these chapters.

The king's charges against Jeremiah are countered not by a legal defence, but rather by YHWH's assertion of His role as judge. And so Jeremiah's role resembles prosecutor more than defendant.

However, perhaps there is something more than accusation implicit in the king's 'why?' question. Perhaps the king is asking why Jeremiah is so unlike the prophets of peace of his day. Perhaps he's asking why the message is unremittingly negative. Perhaps he's asking for hope.¹²⁸

If this is so, it better explains how Jeremiah's reply fits. In response to the king's citations of judgement oracles, YHWH Himself reiterates that punishment is coming and well deserved. But judgement is not the last word, and though Jeremiah struggles to understand it, there *is* a message of hope and restoration.

Thus, in the encounter with Hanamel, the main theme appears to me to be confidence in the future. Hanamel represents loss of confidence, a position that Jeremiah seems to have shared. Yet YHWH compels him to act in a way that communicates the opposite. Purchasing land during a war makes sense only if you like the odds of capitalising on it after the war has ended. Despite his reputation as prophet of doom (nicely captured by the king's accusations), Jeremiah is given the role of optimist. He was to be a picture of hope even though the view outside the city demonstrated that all earthly reason for hope was already exhausted.

The sign-act, with its fastidious legality, its long-term preservation, and its allusion to the covenant served to communicate that God had not broken off covenant relationship entirely. Though the terms of Deuteronomy had been shattered, YHWH intended to restore His people to His land.

This provokes a note of protest from Jeremiah whose prayer affirms that God's punishment of the nation is deserved. Due to their violation of the covenant, God was justly visiting upon His people the 'fruit of their works'. The prayer culminates in disbelief that he should represent hope just as the judgement that he had been preaching was about to be fulfilled. He questions what appears to be a change of God's mind.

God's response repeats true statements back to Jeremiah, but includes with them a note of accusation. 'Is anything too difficult for Him?' He is able to restore His people just as He was able to bring life out of Sarah's dead womb. 'The city will be made desolate.' Yes, He has spoken words of judgement, but they are not the last words.

¹²⁸ Jeremiah 21 records an instance in which Zedekiah sends messengers particularly to inquire of him whether the Lord has a message of hope for them. On that occasion, the message is calculated to dash his hopes of deliverance.

The broken covenant does not mean the end of God's nation; He intends to forge a new covenant, and thereby to ensure unsullied relationship with Him and uninterrupted blessing for His people. People will be restored to the Promised Land and planted there permanently.

So this chapter is not an obvious rebuttal to the king's complaint, but it does address the concerns at the heart of it. Jeremiah is not behaving treacherously or blasphemously when delivering judgement; the covenant is broken, and the Babylonians are merely God's agents of deserved wrath. And the implicit criticism for Jeremiah's unrelenting hopelessness is answered surprisingly with a message of comfort that even Jeremiah had not anticipated. In the face of such deserved judgement, God plans graciously to bring restoration and a new covenant.

4.2.4 Conclusions

This passage has suggested the following observations that are relevant to the theme of prosperity.

Grace not merit

An underlying theme of the account of the land transaction is that of grace. Hanamel seems merely to be cutting his losses at Jeremiah's expense, rather than bearing a genuine concern for family redemption. As one willing to give up his inheritance, he may be thought of as a representative of the unfaithful nation at large. They had long since given up on the Promised Land as the environment of relationship with YHWH, and thus the Promised Land would spit them out too. They would be ejected to Babylon with only what they could carry.

Hanamel likely belonged to the family group that had already threatened to murder Jeremiah, and he compounds his guilt by attempting to exploit Jeremiah's sense of duty. Despite being unworthy of help, Jeremiah is instructed to play redeemer to him, and to fastidiously see to the keeping of contractual obligations. This is an act of grace towards a faithless kinsman that is surely intended to mirror God's faithfulness to His covenant – and his intention to renew the covenant – with His wayward people.

Thus we see again that the receipt of God's favour is not based upon merit but upon His generosity. Judgement, on the other hand, *is* given by reward. The chapter makes much of how deserved is the punishment that the nation is receiving, and even the picturesque description of houses burning like smoke offerings – making ironic reference to profane fires offered to other gods – communicates that the siege is direct recompense for rebellion.

New Covenant relationship

The New Covenant material in this chapter is a significant contributor to the theme of divine-human relationship that we have been pursuing.

The sword of judgement is falling upon the nation as the oracles in this chapter are given. Israel has so violated the covenant that they are now to be dragged into exile. The language of restoration and renewal that pervades the chapter establishes that the problem of wandering hearts must first be solved before blessing can be given wholeheartedly.

In the New Covenant, there are no conditions, no warnings, and no curses. God promises to bring about the long-desired relationship of God with His people (verse 38) by providing new, undivided hearts that will fear Him eternally; God Himself will provide the means of sustaining relationship. On this basis, YHWH commits to 'doing good' to His people in His land without reservation.

We can see, therefore, that a proper order of relationship is the essential foundation of blessing.¹²⁹ Observe the pattern evident in Jeremiah:

Rebellious heart > breakdown of relationship > withdrawal of good (exile)

New heart > eternally inviolable relationship > uninterrupted good (Promised Land)

So, prosperity can only succeed (i.e. be given unreservedly) when the problem of human sinfulness has been removed from the equation.

The role of the land

Just as the breakdown of relationship culminates in eviction from the land, so also the ultimate expression of God's gifts of goodness is the wholehearted, deep-rooted planting of His people in His land. In verse 41 of this chapter, God's intention to 'do good' to His people is virtually synonymous with being in the land. The land stands as a summary statement of God's promises of blessing.

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Let us now look at some related texts that help to flesh out these themes.

¹²⁹ For the sake of clarity, allow me to reiterate that this does not establish a recompense system in any way. Blessing is not the reward for those who meet certain criteria. Israel's failure demonstrates general human incapacity for faithfulness. For the generosity of God to be offered unreservedly, He needs to provide the heart that doesn't wander.

4.3 INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The book of Jeremiah is structurally difficult, but there is a noticeable difference at least between chapters 1-24, which are mostly poetic and undated, and 25-36, which are episodic and dated (Allen, 2008:12). Furthermore, it is possible to single out chapters 30-33, the so-called 'Book of Consolation', which are all positive in tone.

Some attention in the composition of the book seems to have been paid to themes shared in common, and thus many of the surrounding chapters contain material of interest to this study.

4.3.1 Prosperity in exile

Jeremiah 29 falls outside of the 'Book of Consolation', but it shares many similarities. It includes, for example, one of the prophecies of the restoration from exile after 70 years have been served.

Of particular interest is the instruction that YHWH gives the exiles while in Babylon. It reads:

⁴ 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare¹³⁰ of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.' (Jeremiah 29:4-7, ESV)

One of the main functions of this passage is that it contributes to the message that the exiles would be in exile for a long time. They are not to spend the time waiting in expectation of immediate return; they are to engage in ordinary life in Babylon, and they are to ensure that the next generation flourishes.

Allen (2008:324) points out that the commands to build homes, plant gardens, marry, and bear children mimics traditional formulas to do with settled life in the *Promised Land* (e.g. Deuteronomy 20:5-7). In other words, while they await the call to return, life is to continue as normal in Babylon, which is to be regarded as their new, semi-permanent home.

Verse 7 is of particular interest to the theme of prosperity, because it provides a basis for understanding the relationship of prosperity to Exile. Tellingly, although the exiles are encouraged to settle using terms usually reserved for the Promised Land, Babylon is in no way a new Canaan for

¹³⁰ 'Welfare' translates שְׁלוֹם in all three occurrences in verse 7.

them. The *promises* of blessing rest upon the return to the Promised Land and are brought about through the grace and power of God; what is offered in exile is far more limited and contingent. Prosperity is not promised; it depends on the efforts of the exiles. *Shalom* for the exiles is not promised; it is dependent upon the *shalom* of the city. If the NIV is correct to translate this verse as conditional, the contingency is even more pronounced: ‘*if it prospers, you too will prosper.*’ This suggests that the prosperity of the exiles is not governed by promise, but by providence.

This is supported by the remainder of the chapter. In 29:10-14, life in exile is contrasted with God’s future plans, which gives the impression that the Exile is a hiatus, a period of waiting. The language of promise reappears here in connection with future hope of return to the Promised Land; assurances of restoration and good fortune are located *there*:

10 “For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope... 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. (ESV)

Reference to building, planting, and marrying appears again in chapters 30-33 in connection with the return to the Promised Land. Notably, where these terms were used of Babylon, the building and planting were to be the labours of the people; the passages in 30-33 speak of *God’s* work in building Israel (31:4; 31:27-28) so that the people can again marry, plant etc. (31:5). Thus the exiles are told to build lives for themselves as best they can in Babylon, but upon return, God is the builder.

Thus there seems to be no certainty of prosperity for exiles and no promises guaranteeing blessing. In short, ‘Promised Land’ is a concept that cannot be spiritualised or transferred to another territory such that Babylon could temporarily occupy that role. It does not follow the exiles wherever they’re scattered or appear whenever God is specially present with them. It is a fixed place of God’s choosing that must be received as an inheritance from Him. God’s promises would apply again once they had returned to that place.

4.3.2 Prosperity and the Davidic Messiah

Another important feature of the ‘Book of Comfort’ is the role of the Davidic Messiah in the fruition of the promises of prosperity. This theme is connected to chapter 32 by means of a shared setting and repeated language in chapter 33.

Chapter 33 is introduced as the second time that the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah while in captivity in Zedekiah's court. The chapter describes more fully what is intended in the promise made in chapter 32 to restore the nation's fortunes. Significantly, the promises of restoration for the nation hinge on the restoration of David to the throne, and the return of righteous rule and justice (33:15). This results in Judah's salvation, the security (בטח) of Jerusalem, and the renaming of the city to 'YHWH our righteousness' (33:16). Thus at the heart of return from Exile is YHWH's Messiah who restores right relationship between YHWH and His people.

The chapter ends with a reiteration of God's faithfulness to His eternal covenants with Creation, with the Patriarchs, and with David:

'Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.' (33:25-26, ESV)

This emphasises again that although the Sinai covenant had been broken, God's commitment to His people continued on the basis of His eternal promises.

Jeremiah 30 also speaks of the reign of David as central to the restoration of the fortunes of Israel and Judah. The twin kingdoms would be brought back to their land and returned to their ancestral inheritance (30:3), and foreign rule would be replaced with service of YHWH and David their king (30:8-9). Their prince would come from their ranks (30:21), and this time, 'you shall be my people, and I will be your God' (30:22). The culmination of David's reinstatement is the fruition at last of the covenant ideal.¹³¹

4.3.3 The role of the land

Witness in the Book of Comfort is consistent that God's promises and the return of *shalom* all hang on the return to the land. Fretheim (2002:455) suggests another connection between land and promise in the text of chapter 32, proposing that there is an allusion in the sign-act to Abraham's purchase of the field in Machpelah (Genesis 23). He notes that the possession of a piece of the Promised Land was a sign reiterating God's intention to bring about the promise.

Jeremiah's token possession of a field may be intended to call Genesis 23 to mind, which would serve to link New Covenant promises in this text to the Abrahamic promises that stood prior to the

¹³¹ Cf. Ezekiel 34:23-31; 37:23-28

now-broken Mosaic Covenant. This is especially significant if Fretheim is correct in his suggestion (2002:448f) that on-going relationship between YHWH and the community of Israel could only continue because of God's irrevocable promises to Abraham that remained intact.¹³²

4.3.4 New Covenant relationship

Restoration of fortunes in the Book of Comfort is heavily tied up with the new relationship that YHWH promises to set up with His people. Chapter 32 had spoken of this as a new heart that is built to fear YHWH. In the 'second word from YHWH' of chapter 33, the language of healing, cleansing, and forgiveness is used. This restoration of relationship is a precondition of the provision of *shalom*, which we see in verse 6:

Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity¹³³ and security (33:6, ESV)

and again in verse 8-9:

I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. (33:8-9, ESV)

God cleanses His people so that the relationship is restored, and it is under these conditions that God delights to bless with abundant goodness.

Note in this latter passage that the city that had always been a source of God's anger and rage (32:31) becomes a source of joy, bringing God glory before all the nations (cf. Deuteronomy 4:6-8). It envisages the complete turn-around in relationship promised under the New Covenant.

Chapter 31 is one of the classic New Covenant prophecies, and thus it is an important counterpart to chapter 32. It contains picturesque descriptions of the content of New Covenant prosperity (again with restoration of relationship as a necessary precursor):

8 'Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labour, together; a

¹³² He adds that there are other references to the story of Abraham throughout chapters 30-33 (2002:455), which suggests that the relationship established through the eternal covenant with Abraham is at the core of Israel's future comfort.

¹³³ The word translated 'prosperity' here is שָׁלוֹם. Rather than rendering אָמֶת as 'security', Stendebach (2006:37) argues, 'This last phrase should be understood as hendiadys, meaning "enduring שָׁלוֹם, שָׁלוֹם on which one can rely, which will hold good in the future." If this is favoured, it adds to the sense of irrevocability of the New Covenant.

great company, they shall return here. 9 With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.'

10 'Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock." 11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. 12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. 13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. 14 I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the LORD.' (31:8-14, ESV)

The language describing prosperity need not be regarded in a rigidly literal way, but it is at least abundantly clear that it includes material categories and that life like a 'watered garden' has an Eden-like character. It is comprehensive good, as Eden was.

Verse 14 is important, because it seems to make explicit what we have been arguing is true of all God-given prosperity, namely that the gift of good things is meant to reveal the character of the Giver, and that it is meant to serve the relationship with Him. It is ambiguous: it is not certain whether YHWH's 'goodness' (טוֹב) in verses 12 and 14 should be understood as the goodness of the things that He gives, or as a quality that He possesses. The parallelism in verse 12 especially would seem to support the former, but the point in both passages is surely that the things that He provides are a reflection upon Him, and thus the rejoicing should be on account of Him. Prosperity is concerned not with satisfaction in good things, but with satisfaction in His goodness.

Jeremiah 31:29-34 mentions the New Covenant directly, filling in some more of the distinctions between the Old Covenant and the New.

It begins with some puzzling words about judgement:

'In those days they shall no longer say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But everyone shall die for his own sin. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.' (31:29-30, ESV)

While dying for sins seems out of place in a covenant that is elsewhere characterised by fear of YHWH and obedience on the heart, Brueggemann (1998:291) explains that the passage is actually redeploing a proverb to communicate that a new start is possible:

'The refutation of the proverb, and therefore the dismissal of conventional wisdom, asserts that newness is possible for the generation of the Exile. God can indeed "plant and build" for and with and

in that generation. Paul Joyce has shown that this statement is not an eruption of “individualism” in the community, as much interpretation has heretofore accepted, but simply an assertion of newness possible for the new generation of exiles.’

In other words, if the Exile was seen as punishment for sins that had accrued over the generations, this revised proverb indicates that the slate has been wiped clean.

On this new slate, as it were, God writes His law. Unlike the Old Covenant that always remained external to the people and was broken, the New Covenant will be within, written on the heart:

‘But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’ (31:33, ESV)

Finally, verse 34 teaches that under the New Covenant, barriers to relationship will be removed (‘For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more,’) and so each person will know the Lord without mediation.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

Let us draw together the conclusions derived from this chapter.

4.4.1 The content of prosperity: Broad scope of blessing

The most important contribution of Jeremiah to the content of prosperity is the explicit reference to delight in the goodness of YHWH (31:12, 14). This is perhaps the overarching theme that should cover all comments about the content of prosperity: the primary content is ultimately a person.

We have been at pains to consider what exactly is offered in God’s promises to man – and it is necessary to observe, for example, that the promises are indeed often material in nature – but it is a perversion of blessing to consider its contents as an end in themselves. The good that we may receive from God’s hand is bound up inextricably with His goodness and our delight in Him. To do otherwise is idolatry.

That being said, examining the language that is employed of blessing in these chapters reveals that the sorts of blessings in view tend to be non-specific and comprehensive. Given that the land of total blessing is being lost (and that by means of war, famine, and plague), it is natural to expect that reversal would be promised with corresponding totality.

Thus Jeremiah's favourite words by which he refers to coming blessing are the most general – **טוב** and **שְׁלוֹם**. Höver-Johag (1986:315) points out that **טוב** is particularly material in Jeremiah, and not to do with moral goodness. He says:

In Jeremiah, **טוב** frequently appears in the context of [salvation history], referring to the future well-being of both nation and individual (Jer. 8:15; 14:11, 19; 17:6; etc.). It takes on special importance as the substance of the new covenant... (Jer. 32:40-42; cf. 33:9, 11, 14)... Human beings experience God's goodness in the form of good things... The reference is to material goods that make for a happy life... without regard to moral qualities.

It is clear when Jeremiah does get specific that prospering is *material*; the goodness of the Lord is expressed in grain, wine, oil, fertile flocks, and Eden-like living (31:12). This is not to attempt to deny spiritual blessings, but merely to point out again that even in the New Covenant promises, the blessings that God's people enjoy are conceived of materially.

שְׁלוֹם is a favourite term for Jeremiah (though not for the writers of the Pentateuch) presumably because the state of wholeness and repose to which it refers was so starkly juxtaposed against the horrors of siege that were so fresh in the minds of his readers. Rest, peace, and satisfaction would have been highly prized for such people. Jeremiah therefore also prioritises the concept of security (**בְּטָחָה**) among the concepts of blessing. As we saw, this could relate even to the enjoyment of material prosperity, because 'dwelling securely', free from the ravages of war and theft, is a necessary condition for enjoyment of the good.

4.4.2 The ethics of prosperity: Generosity

Jeremiah 32 and its surrounding chapters contribute little to our understanding of the ethics of prosperity. The only notable passage occurs in 33:14-16 concerning the arrival of David's 'Branch':

'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."' (ESV)

Having just described the hope of such prosperity that it would cause the nations to tremble, Jeremiah announces again that blessing is connected to the reinstatement of a Davidic Messiah and the restoration of just rule. In the work of the pre-exilic prophets, injustice is particularly described in terms of the prosperous exploiting the poor, and this is blamed for the coming exile (e.g. Amos

2:6-16; 4:1-3). Though Jeremiah 33 is non-specific, it can be inferred that prosperity with justice will at least oppose exploitation of the weak, and surely includes active care for the poor and helpless.

4.4.3 The environment of prosperity: The Promised Land

In the chapter on Deuteronomy 6, I argued that conclusions about the place of the Promised Land were at best tentative, because the emphasis upon it could be explained by the setting of the book: the significance of being about to enter the land for the first time could be the reason why it is spoken of as so central to the promises.

In one sense this could be true also of Jeremiah: the enormity losing the land might explain the dominance of return to the land among the promises. There is, however, one crucial difference. If the land of Canaan did not occupy the exclusive place for which I have been arguing in this thesis, Jeremiah and the other exilic prophets had the perfect opportunity to explain that the Promised Land is an abstract concept, not a physical place, or to encourage them to set up enclaves of promise while in foreign lands. The new prominence given to synagogue worship is an example of the adaptability of Israelite faith while in exile; why not adapt or transfer the concept of Promised Land?

For the prophets to emphasise the resumption of promise only upon restoration to the *land* of promise is therefore significant. Neither the land of Canaan, nor the city of Jerusalem, nor the temple of YHWH could be relocated on a whim or 'spiritualised' so that they could become portable. They were the places chosen by God for the dwelling of His name, and He is the sole arbiter of where His presence is to be.

This is not to say that these places are fixed for all time – as I will argue in due course, the Christian view of the location of God's city and His presence is indeed radically different to Jeremiah's view. Nevertheless, the point is that promise and blessing are only to be found in the place where God chooses specially to dwell with His people. To dwell outside is to dwell in a place of darkness.

Thus we see in Jeremiah 29 that prosperity may be sought while in Exile, but it is contingent, not promised. Whatever one's fate in Exile, it remained a time of punishment, and blessing remained an experience in the distant future.

Secondly, Jeremiah 32 placed the Land in a central role in the restoration: when hearts had been given the fear of YHWH, He would plant them in the Land wholeheartedly, and in its context, being planted in the land is virtually synonymous with God's intention to bring unrelenting good.

Post-exilic realities

There is not the space for a satisfactory discussion of how the realities that the returnees from Exile experienced matched up to the promises that they had received. The post-exilic prophets and the books of Ezra-Nehemiah describe conditions of famine, persecution, fear of enemies, and unbroken foreign occupation. The blessings had not come to fruition though the dispersion had ended. Similarly, there was no innate fear of the Lord or obedience, and religious laxity had to be repeatedly counteracted. The promised Davidic kingship was partially (but disappointingly) prefigured in the leadership of Zerubbabel before it too languished.

The end of the Exile was clearly only partial, but God's return to His people still lay in the future. Thus, although the Promised Land remained the only true environment of blessing, it was insufficient merely to be there. Blessing is first and foremost a favourable relationship with the Father, and for that to be restored, there needed to be an end to rebellious hearts, the just rule of the Messiah, and the true end of human captivity.

It is for this reason that Christ came announcing the kingdom as an end of the Exile. The true beginning of the End only started then.

4.4.4 The sphere of prosperity: Relationship

The New Covenant is central to these chapters, defining a new basis of relationship with God for His people. This covenant describes a relationship that is final, ultimate, unconditional, and incorruptible. In Jeremiah 30-33, all the promises of prosperity are preceded by descriptions of this restored and perfected relationship; prosperity is not promised until that relationship has been restored and sin has been dealt with. Nel (1997b:132) in his study on *shalom* adds,

‘Peace (שָׁלוֹם) according to the prophetic preaching is the result of restored righteousness and cannot be achieved while one is persisting in sin and evil.’

Rebellion is an interruption of relationship, and thus wholeness and satisfaction with God (שָׁלוֹם) cannot exist until rebellion is no longer a threat. Prosperity under the Old Covenant was therefore always a danger to its possessor, because although we see in Jeremiah 31:14 that prosperity is given because of God's goodness and because it encourages delight in God's goodness, that purpose was thwarted by idolatrous attitudes that prized the gift over the Giver. The New Covenant can wholeheartedly promise prosperity because it will be preceded by the removal of rebellion from human hearts.

4.4.5 The dynamics of prosperity: Absence of cause-and-effect

The final hypothesis to test is that of dynamics. Is there a cause-and-effect relationship between merit and prosperity? The answer is again a resounding no.

In Jeremiah 32 we see plenty of evidence that *punishment* is dispensed on the basis of recompense (Jeremiah's prayer argues at length that the nation is deserving of its judgement),¹³⁴ but there is no trace of *reward* measured out mechanically in this way. On the contrary, we meet Hanamel early in the chapter, and he seems to be entirely undeserving of the bailout that he receives from his persecuted, imprisoned cousin. Jeremiah's actions prefigure God's own acts of grace towards a people undeserving of the redemption they will receive and the blessing that is promised.

Secondly, the land that is traded is a family inheritance in the Promised Land. Jeremiah's prayer mentions the first time that the nation went and took possession of the Promised Land. Keown *et al* (1995:157) point out that inheritances are given and possessed, not earned. It implies that Israel gained the land by God's initiative, not theirs. Even the land itself is a reminder of grace not reward.

Thirdly, the text emphasises the loss of hope in Israel's future. Hanamel cashed out; Jeremiah seems to have thought that this was a wise thing to do; the sayings of the people that YHWH cites all emphasise defeat. Their punishment was deserved, and lack of hope was the reasonable reaction. Yet God responds with comfort, restoration, and a New Covenant. He initiates all of it, and He promises unimaginable good to those who return to Him. He even provides the hearts that have the capacity to live up to the relational demands. There is nothing whatever in these promises that can be attributed to cause and effect or that will be contingent upon human effort.

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The most alarming thing about God's promises concerning the New Covenant is how unequivocal they are. The promises of unrestrained blessing and uncorrupted human relationship are startlingly clear. Yet they were not experienced at all by the returnees from Exile, and hope of their fulfilment were rekindled half a millennium later in the ministries of John and Jesus. Since Jesus' death and resurrection, and since the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Christian church would self-identify as God's New Covenant people, yet even we do not experience these promises fully. We are therefore still waiting for 'That Day', and for the final defeat of occupying enemy forces.

¹³⁴ Although even this is not a *mechanical* process.

5. PSALM 128

The final chapter to exegete is from the Psalms, more specifically, one of the psalms that are commonly classified as belonging to the wisdom genre. This will enable us to launch a brief examination of the place of prosperity in Israel's worship and wisdom.

5.1 TRANSLATION

- ¹ A song of ascents.¹³⁵
 Good fortune of everyone who fears YHWH
 Who walks in his ways.
² The labour of your hands surely¹³⁶ you shall eat
 Your good fortune
 and good (things) to you.¹³⁷
³ Your wife like a fruitful vine

¹³⁵ Allen (2002:193f) identifies various possible interpretation of 'ascents', but most likely is that it refers to pilgrimage to Jerusalem (cf. Psalm 24:4, Isaiah 2:3). This explains, for example, the preoccupation with Zion evident in many of them.

¹³⁶ Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:396) identify two main possibilities for the use of **כִּי**, namely what they call deictic ('truly, certainly, surely') and causative ('for'). Dahood (1970:228) offers a minor variation on the former, rendering it as an emphatic particle ('indeed you shall eat'), whereas Alter (2007:451) prefers a variation on the latter, rendering it 'when' ('When you eat...'). Alter's version makes good sense of the verse, as it can more naturally accommodate the noun clauses that follow ('When you eat... happy are you'), especially seeing as the declaration of 'happiness' has already been made in verse 1, and thus seems redundant in verse 2. Zenger opposes the causative options because the position of **כִּי** in the sentence would make it unlikely to function as a conjunction. In the use of **כִּי** again in verse 4 there is less doubt that it is meant to be emphatic, and so I am persuaded to render it as such in verse 2.

¹³⁷ There are many ways in which these noun clauses could be translated; for example, 'Happy are you, for it will go well with you,' (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:396); 'Happy are you and it is good for you,' (Alter, 2007:451); 'How fortunate you are! You will get on well,' (Allen, 2002:241); 'Happiness and prosperity shall be yours,' (Dahood, 1970:227). Given the lack of consensus, I have generally preferred to reflect the openness of these clauses by translating as directly as possible.

Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:396) note that it is the interpreter's judgement as to form and genre that determines how one translates the noun clauses in verses 2-3. They consider this section of the psalm to be a beatitude rather than a pronouncement of a blessing, and thus they advocate the insertion of indicative verbs into these clauses (e.g. 'Your wife will be like a fruitful vine') rather than jussive (e.g. 'May your wife be...'). I also would advocate viewing 1-4 in this way, though I still prefer to retain the ambiguity in translation.

In the recesses of your house
 Your children¹³⁸ like olive shoots
 Around your table.
 4 Behold, surely thus¹³⁹ shall the man be blessed who fears YHWH.
 5 May YHWH bless you from Zion
 (That you)¹⁴⁰ look upon the good of Jerusalem
 All the days of your life.
 6 (That you) look at¹⁴¹ the children of your children.
 Well-being¹⁴² upon Israel.

5.2 EXEGESIS

We will begin our exegetical study with a preliminary verse-by-verse analysis of the text.

5.2.1 Preliminary analysis

[1]

This psalm is titled ‘a song of ascents’. There is no consensus about the meaning of this superscription. According to Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:287ff) the Hebrew **הַמִּעֲלֹת** can refer to steps or to the act of ascending or perhaps even to a pilgrimage. They proceed to list some of the scholarly interpretations of the phrase, which are as follows:

- Gesenius believed that the superscription should be translated as ‘gradual songs’, as the song builds towards a climax through the use of anadiplosis¹⁴³ rather than parallelism.

¹³⁸ This may be specifically referring to ‘sons’; also in verse 6.

¹³⁹ Dahood (1970:227) argues on the basis Ugaritic parallels that **כִּי** should be understood as a ‘divine appellative’ meaning ‘the Reliable’. He sees this also in Psalm 127:2. He suggests this in order to account for what he considers to be an otherwise-strange use of **כִּי**, but to make it work he needs also to repoint the *Pual* of **בָּרַךְ** to make it *Piel*. The use of **כִּי** is accounted for easily enough as emphatic, and so there is no need to resort to this solution.

¹⁴⁰ Allen (2002:242) says that **י** + imperative expresses consequence. Goldingay (2008:511f) arrives at the same conclusion but by different working. He argues that the four lines that make up verses 5-6a follow an a-b-a’-b’ pattern. The two ‘a’ lines read as continuous, i.e. ‘May YHWH bless you... all the days of your life’, and he takes the two ‘b’ lines as promises that form the content of the blessings. He arrives at this conclusion on the grounds that, ‘the two parallel biddings [the ‘b’ lines] instance the Hebrew idiom whereby a promise can be expressed by means of imperatives that follow on a jussive’ (2008:512). His footnote adds that this idiom also makes it likely that the preceding line should be expressed as ‘May YHWH bless’.

¹⁴¹ Goldingay (2008:512) notes that ‘to look upon’ in 5b often means something slightly different than ‘to look (at)’ in 6b. The former often includes a sense of pleasure that is absent in the latter. This is not to suggest that there is an absence of feeling in the sight of one’s grandchildren, but rather that the emphasis in the latter is upon witnessing. This witnessing of one’s grandchildren therefore bears testimony to longevity, fertility, and the continuation of the family line.

¹⁴² ‘Well-being’ follows Goldingay’s (2008:507) suggested translation of the Hebrew **שְׁלוֹם**. This is preferred to the more common translation as ‘peace’ (e.g. Alter, 2007:452) because it better captures the breadth of reference that is implied.

¹⁴³ ‘The resumption of a word/motif in successive verses/cola,’ (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:295)

- Qimchi considered the grades or stages to refer to progression in the manner of performance.
- Augustine, Rashi, and Dahood are listed as supporting the view that it describes the 'ascent' of the soul to God.
- Hirsch shares Josephus' view that the 15 ascent psalms correlates with the 15 steps that led to the temple's forecourt, but he adds that there is also a pattern of 'ascent' in the content of the collection, from national degradation through 'upward striving' to 'the spiritual height of its destiny in the sanctuary of the law'.
- Older interpretations take them to be 'songs for those returning from Exile', but this has fallen out of favour.¹⁴⁴
- Seybold views these psalms as 'songs for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem', forming part of a pilgrim's temple liturgy. 'The collection begins... with a prayer at the starting point in a foreign land (Ps 120). This is followed by a blessing of the journey (Ps 121), greetings on arrival in Jerusalem (Ps 122), and then various texts for use during visits to the sanctuaries (Pss 123ff), up to the penitential prayer (Ps 130), the pilgrim's confession (Ps 131), meditation on events of salvation history...; it ends, finally, with the blessing on departure from Zion (Ps 134)' (Hossfeld and Zenger, 2011:289f).¹⁴⁵
- Crow also views these as pilgrim songs, but proposes that they are a synthesis of a northern-kingdom farm-life perspective and formulaic, cultic, Zion theology. This combination served to promote the unity of the nation around Jerusalem and to motivate pilgrimages to Jerusalem in expression of that unity and for 'the encounter with the beneficent God of Israel to be encountered there' (Hossfeld and Zenger, 2011:291).
- Mowinckel is a proponent of the view that this collection was used as songs for the temple liturgy, in his view especially a festival celebrating YHWH's ascent to the throne.¹⁴⁶ Liebreich points out that there are repeated connections to the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6 in twelve of the psalms, and argues that the collection of fifteen psalms was made in order to match the fifteen words of the blessing. He claims that the superscription of these psalms refers to the fact that the priests pronounced the blessing on the steps of the temple.

¹⁴⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger reject this interpretation on the grounds that it is a reconstruction of the history of the psalms' origins that is imposed from outside of the text and not from the psalms themselves; that there is no external evidence to support their dating; and that there are 'general hypotheses' about the collection drawn from 'individual aspects' of the psalms. It therefore fails to explain why these psalms are a collection in the first place.

¹⁴⁵ The criticism of this analysis is largely that the assignment of roles for individual psalms is too vague.

¹⁴⁶ Hossfeld and Zenger consider this latter view unlikely due to the absence of the royal title for YHWH.

- A number of authors have recently proposed that the ascent-psalm collection is aimed at more eschatological or contemplative ends, inviting readers either to participate in an eschatological ‘feast of Sukkoth’ celebrating YHWH’s victory, or to become incorporated into ‘Zion’ imaginatively, allowing worshippers all over Israel to express faith in Zion as the source of blessing wherever they may be.¹⁴⁷
- Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:294) themselves propose that these brief, memorable psalms probably developed in and around Jerusalem as individual songs about YHWH and Zion. They speculate that the songs may have been sung to beautiful melodies and may even have been taken back from pilgrimages as souvenirs (whether in the memory or perhaps even written on scrolls or trinkets). The collection of popular worship songs may have been whittled down and shaped into a coherent compendium of fifteen psalms (‘as a kind of “Zion cantata”,’ the authors tentatively suggest), with the reason for their number a matter of speculation (Aaron’s fifteen-word blessing, or the steps of a certain flight in the temple are both possible).

Hossfeld and Zenger’s view is appealing because it is flexible enough to account for similarities in the texts and divergences, and it is able to incorporate the good proposals of other scholars (such as the focus on pilgrims, Zion theology, similarities to Aaron’s blessing) in a plausible and unforced way. They add the interesting suggestion that the focus in some of the psalms upon the ‘little man’ – farm workers and labourers – may have been intended to lend these marginalised people special respect, and to communicate to them that even those who have no direct share in Jerusalem ‘may participate in the blessing of Zion – either through a “real” pilgrimage or by singing these songs far from Zion’ (2011:298).

Psalm 128 is concerned with the good fortune that attends the YHWH-fearing man – one who appears to be of simple, rural stock – and makes the appeal for such blessings to flow upon all His people out of Zion. This commends it as one that advocates the sort of Zion-focused national solidarity that Hossfeld and Zenger describe. However, there is no external evidence by which the text can be dated nor any of these opinions confirmed, which leaves us in the realm of speculation. It is tempting to favour Hossfeld and Zenger’s view simply because it is able to find a role for virtually all of the scholars’ positions listed above, but this merely makes it a successful explanation, not a correct one. We will therefore be circumspect about basing much of significance upon views about the superscription.

¹⁴⁷ Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:293) reject this view on account of the lack of points of contact with such interpretations in the texts themselves, as well as other poor fits with literary and historical data.

‘The good fortune of everyone...’ The opening noun, אֲשֶׁרִי, describes the good fortune of man who fears YHWH. Gerstenberger (2001:349) identifies this as the characteristic opening of the ‘beatitude’ genre, in which the speaker confers ‘extraordinary bliss on a person who lives up to certain standards of ethical and religious behaviour’; while this type of literature is found in the surrounding ancient cultures as well, those in the Psalter ‘are mostly YHWH-oriented sayings’ that ‘encourage strict adherence to YHWH and His will’.

Sarna (1993:29f) says this of אֲשֶׁרִי clauses:

‘The phrase is really an exclamation meaning, “O for the happiness of that person...!” It is the discriminating judgement of an observer who expresses wonderment and admiration over another’s enviable state of being. More than this, *‘ashrei* is in the plural, the inflectional form denoting intensity... It is the highest form of happiness that the psalmist has in mind.’

Thus, in the case of Psalm 128, the greatest good is pictured in the life of the ideal fearer of YHWH, and the psalmist expresses the desirability of that state for him and his listener.

‘Everyone who fears YHWH.’ Although there is again no consensus,¹⁴⁸ the majority view holds that the אֲשֶׁרִי formula associates this psalm with wisdom literature (Alter, 2007:451).¹⁴⁹ The theme of the fear of YHWH is common in wisdom literature, though scholars differ over the implications of this phrase. Traditionally, it has been common to assert that the wisdom tradition springs from confidence in reason and experience as arbiters of knowledge, and that God’s role is as creator who programmed the world with the principles by which it functions, and who oversees the operation of justice in its workings. Crenshaw (1981:17f) says of wisdom that, ‘It asks what is good for men and women, and it believes that all essential answers can be learned in experience.’

We will discuss the comparison of wisdom and covenantal traditions in section 5.3 on cause-and-effect dynamics. For now, let us merely note that the perception of a division between these traditions is evident in the discussion of the fear of YHWH in this psalm. Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:400) are adamant that in wisdom theology, the fear of YHWH – as ‘the basic precondition and

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Whybray, 1995:152ff for a brief account of this debate. He argues later that the pronouncement of happiness or good fortune is very common in Psalms (26 occurrences) and actually relatively rare in wisdom books; it appears only a total of 10 times across all of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. He argues that the phrase may be more characteristic of poetry. He claims that many of the means of classification have a similarly questionable basis (1995:159).

¹⁴⁹ Whybray (1995:153) insists that the definition of a ‘wisdom psalm’ is difficult and classification is too subjective; nevertheless he records (seemingly without disapproval) RE Murphy’s judgement that, on the basis of generic similarities with acknowledged wisdom literature, Psalm 128 is among the most ‘successful examples’ of wisdom literature in the Psalter. It must be noted, however, as I shall discuss below, that by ‘wisdom literature’ I mean a broad genre of writing – a genre like any other, dissociated from worldview, flexible, adaptable, able to be combined with others, and able to be used in the employ of various authors’ perspectives – not the literary product of a distinguishable ‘wisdom school’. Thus I mean to say that this is a song that has incorporated features of the wisdom genre, which is not a high-stakes statement.

fundamental principle of all “knowledge” – is specifically *not* the fear of the Lord that is associated with faithful obedience as God’s elect people and the ‘fulfilment of a salvation-historical calling; rather it is a foundational trust in YHWH as the good, life-promoting creator God who... rules the universe and brings success on the path of life to those who seek to recognise the proper order of life and act in accordance with it’. Thus, the wise man who fears YHWH, according to proponents of this view, is remarkably like the 18th Century deist: he believes that God has ordered the world, and the life of ‘fear’ is merely the acknowledgement of and conformity to the patterns of divine order.

Other commentators have dissented from this reconstruction of Israelite thought, and prefer to see unity in the understanding of the fear of YHWH across traditions. For example, Krauss (1986:157) says of fear in this psalm,

‘What is involved here is a never-ending commitment to the God of Israel and to His commandments.’

Similarly, Sarna (1993:28f) notes the connection in Psalm 1 between the ‘happy’ (אֲשֶׁר) man and delight in the Torah of YHWH. This puts the psalm in continuity with strongly covenantal texts such as Deuteronomy 6, in which the fear of the Lord is also commended as the quality of relationship that invites YHWH’s blessing. In this way, Israel’s wisdom tradition promotes relationship with God as the sphere of good fortune. If such scholars are correct, though covenant thinking may be muted within wisdom literature, there are significant hints that the traditions are not divorced entirely.

Although Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:400) deny the covenantal connection of wisdom’s ‘fear of YHWH’, they nevertheless arrive at similar conclusions about the practical implications of the fear; it is rooted in relationship.¹⁵⁰

‘The one who fears YHWH finds herself or himself, in a sense, in a right relationship to God, the world, fellow human beings, and himself or herself.’

‘*Who walks in his ways.*’ In parallel with the fear of YHWH in Psalm 128 is the idea of ‘walking in His ways’. This phrase implies that the fear of God and the imitation of Him are synonymous, or at least related requirements. This reinforces the personal nature of blessing relationship. It is not merely adherence to law that YHWH values, but the person who desires to share His character, to walk in His footsteps.

While the question of one’s path of life is again typical of wisdom literature¹⁵¹ (e.g. Psalm 1), walking in the footsteps of YHWH would surely have been associated with covenant obedience, especially in

¹⁵⁰ I acknowledge however that – like the deist – they may mean relationship in the impersonal, patterned sense.

a Psalm of Ascent, connected to the approach to the temple and religious festivals there. In the conjunction of fear, imitation of God, and resultant blessing, this Psalm brings together the wise life and the obedient life.

[2]

Verse 1 makes the pronouncement of ‘good fortune’ or ‘happiness’ in the third person. Verses 2 and 3 are phrased in the second person, addressing the happy person with a description of the content of his good fortune.

Schaefer (2001:xxi) points out that shifts of address such as this are common in dramatic compositions, and may serve a similar purpose in liturgical uses of the Psalms. The shift in this psalm sets up an impersonal ideal in verses 1 and 4, and then turns to address the listener with a personal appeal in verses 2-3, inviting the listener to enter into that ideal.

The life of the happy man is described firstly as one who enjoys the benefits of his labour. As blessings¹⁵² go, this one appears modest – that one should eat that for which one has worked; Alter (2007:451) notes that the good life here is imagined not in terms of excess of wealth, but as sufficiency. Undoubtedly, there is a lesson to be learned in taking satisfaction in simple pleasures.

However, there is potentially more depth to this blessing. Alter (2007:451) points out that biblical curses often speak of others benefitting from the toil of one’s labours, as for example in Deuteronomy 28.¹⁵³ Perhaps it is significant also that Genesis 5:29 describes the curse on mankind as ‘the painful toil of our hands’ (ESV). Being able to enjoy the fruit of one’s labour may therefore intend more than merely the enjoyment of a good meal, but it is potentially representative of the counteraction of Fall.

Moreover, enjoying the labours of one’s hands has a distinguished place in biblical wisdom literature. Ecclesiastes, most notably, considers this blessing to be *superior* to vast wealth, because there is no lasting gain to excess:

¹⁸ I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, ¹⁹ and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I

¹⁵¹ Kuntz (cited by Allen, 2002:242) for example cites the words אֲשֶׁרִי (‘fortunate’) and דֶּרֶךְ (‘way’) among those that are typical wisdom vocabulary.

¹⁵² There is an important difference between the characteristics of the fortunate man, which describe his condition without reference to its source, and blessing, which is particularly something given by God. For ease of reference, I will refer to these good things as blessings, especially because describing them as such seems also to be the intent of verse 4.

¹⁵³ Specifically verses 30, 38-39

toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labours under the sun, ²¹ because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. (Ecclesiastes 2:18-21, ESV)

Secondly, satisfaction surpasses riches because having excess is no guarantee of its enjoyment:

²² What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? ²³ For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. ²⁴ There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? (Ecclesiastes 2:22-25, ESV)

Finally, the gift enjoyment of the fruit of one's work is of a piece with the gifts of 'wisdom and knowledge and joy'. It is a fool's errand to strive after accumulation and to miss pleasure:

²⁶ For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. (Ecclesiastes 2:26, ESV)

Thus the ability to enjoy the fruit of one's labour is one of the supreme gifts given to men 'under the sun', and it is one of the hallmarks of a man blessed by God with wisdom and joy. It represents the thwarting of Adam's curse, and according to the Teacher, there is 'nothing better'.

[3]

Verse 3 moves away from the overtly material and towards the familial. The man of good fortune has a wife like a fruitful vine within the house and sons like olive shoots around the table.

The parallelism in this verse suggests some possibilities for how this verse should be understood. The 'fruitful wife' is parallel with the 'sons', which may be merely due to them both belonging to the family, or it may suggest that fruitfulness has particularly to do with childbearing. Similarly, the parallelism of 'recesses of the house' and 'table' may merely be because they are both within the home, which would suggest that the rooms in the recesses are used particularly for wifely activities. Otherwise, the parallelism with 'table' may be more specific, indicating that the 'recesses of the house' has to do with common family areas and business, such as dining (cf. Goldingay, 2008:510). Thus parallelism alone is insufficient to decide certain issues.

For example, Alter (2007:452) insists that the wife's location in the inner, private parts of the home supports the vocation as child-bearer. Progeny in Israel was especially important, and so this vocation is certainly to be viewed with honour. However, there may be more to it. Goldingay (2008:510) agrees that fruitfulness has the womb especially in view, but he argues that there is no

sexual reference in the terminology here and thus relates activity in the home to general family life. I would add that in the wisdom tradition, such as in Proverbs 31, the good wife is one who is fruitful in the home in a variety of ways beyond giving birth, including commercial industriousness and provision of food for her family. That chapter makes no reference to the wife as a vine (though the wife uses her profit to purchase a vineyard) so there is unlikely to be direct reference between these passages. Yet, in spite of the parallelism with ‘sons around your table’, I would be hesitant to limit even fruitfulness to the womb; the parallelism with ‘table’ may even intend to call to mind her role in material provision for the family. The imagery of fruitfulness may be intentionally non-specific in order to allow for a range of fulfilments.

‘Children like olive shoots’ is another agricultural and economic metaphor, continuing the sense that the family is strong and fertile. Success is passed on to one’s seed. Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:401ff) quote Weippert who has argued that the olive shoot is a particularly potent metaphor, seeing as propagation of new olive trees takes place from the stump of the old, which grows shoots that depend on the root system of the fallen tree. Each sapling is thus a genetic clone of its parent. Weippert says, ‘So the progeny remain standing even when the old roots die. The original endures.’ This imagery serves to highlight the importance of sons to keeping the family name alive, and it also serves to underscore that the sons share the character of this ideal father. Alter (2007:452) identifies the olive tree as a key crop in Israel’s economy, and indeed the olive tree functions as a metaphor for the nation as a whole. Thus this blessing is given a broad scope of fulfilment too: the value of the sons may include their role in continuing the family line, in continuing blessing and virtue, in generating wealth and security, and even in representing Israel’s ideal.

[4]

Verse 4 includes the word כֵּן (‘thus, in this way’), which usually is summative, but may also point forwards to an explanation to follow. Verse 4 repeats the phrase ‘fear of YHWH’ from verse 1, which suggests an inclusion device grouping verses 1-4 together. However, verse 4 begins the use of blessing language (instead of ‘good fortune’), which continues in verse 5 and presents a case for the grouping of verses 4-6 too. We will return to this in the discussion of structure.

Blessing is made overt in this verse with the switch to בֵּרַךְ terminology. Mowinckel (2004:47) claims that there is no difference in meaning between אֲשֶׁרִי and בֵּרַךְ, but this is not precisely correct.¹⁵⁴ Goldingay (2008:511) points out that אֲשֶׁרִי describes a state of being, whereas ‘blessing’ is

¹⁵⁴ He wrote at a time when the animistic view of blessing was generally accepted, and it is this mistaken view of blessing that prevents him from observing any distinction.

connected to personal action that brings about a desired state. ‘Blessing’ has a relational nuance that is absent from **אֲשֶׁר**. The change of terminology makes explicit what has been implicit until now: the good that the YHWH-fearing family enjoys comes by means of God’s favour.

This indicates that the source of good things is God Himself. In conjunction with the reminder that good things are found within a relationship of divine favour, the repetition of the ‘fear of YHWH’ emphasises that the proper place of prosperity is within relationship.

[5]

Verse 5 represents a change in tone from beatitude to prayer, which is appropriate given that blessing terminology has put focus on relationship with YHWH. Grogan (2008:205) argues that the shift from typical wisdom language to that of prayer indicates ‘that the blessings of verses 1-4 are not automatic.’ In other words, although the wisdom-styled blessings of verses 1-4 may appear mechanical (‘If you fear YHWH, this good fortune *will* be your lot’), the shift to an attitude of prayer tacitly acknowledges that there is an element of grace built into the mechanism.

The content of the prayer in verses 5-6 seems to consist of an interweaving of the promises from verses 2-3 with benedictions that call to mind the Aaron’s blessing of Numbers 6. Martens (2009:169) favourably cites Ashley’s view that ‘each of the Ascent psalms (Pss. 121-134) shows some literary allusion to the priestly blessing [of Numbers 6].’¹⁵⁵ Psalm 128 finds connection in the pronouncements of blessing and *shalom* in verses 5 and 6. Allen (2002:244) claims that priests would end festivals and bless the pilgrims on their departure with a benediction from YHWH. This psalm may function as such a benediction, or – if it was a song in the mouths of the pilgrims themselves – at least call the priestly blessings to mind.

Sandwiched between the two clauses reminiscent of Aaron’s blessing are lines with connection to the first half of the psalm. Schaefer (2001:307) notes that verse 5 is related to verse 2 by the repetition of cognate words (**טוֹב** and **טוֹבִים**), and verse 6 is related to verse 3 by the repetition of ‘children’. This connection of verses probably serves to take the personal, family-centred blessings of verses 2-3 and explicitly to invoke them over the nation at large.

¹⁵⁵ Liebreich (cited by Allen, 2002:194) also considered the collection of ‘ascent’ psalms to be a reflection upon the Aaronic benediction, though Allen disagrees that there is consistency. He claims that some of the collection of Psalms (specifically 124, 126, 131) do not share the language and themes of the blessing in Numbers 6.

‘YHWH bless you from Zion.’ Verse 5 links blessing to the location ‘Zion’. Zion is David’s citadel in Jerusalem, but theologically speaking, Krauss (1986:73) identifies it as a designation of the Jerusalem sanctuary, particularly as the place where YHWH dwells or is enthroned.

To specifically cite Zion is interesting in this case, because it serves to link wisdom, prosperity, and the pursuit of the good life – typically non-cultic ideas – to YHWH’s presence in the sanctuary. In this psalm, wisdom sheds secularity and roots itself firmly in the relationship with YHWH mediated via the temple in Jerusalem.

‘The good of Jerusalem.’ Nouns in construct have inherent ambiguity. ‘The good of Jerusalem’ could reasonably be understood as either the good that happens to Jerusalem, or the good that comes from Jerusalem. Goldingay (2008:512) surprisingly vouches for the latter, noting that the parallelism with ‘YHWH bless you’ in verse 5 would suggest that ‘the good of Jerusalem’ refers to the good things coming to the blessed from Jerusalem rather than good things coming to Jerusalem. He is being too linear with his interpretation of parallelism, as it need not work this way; as Gerstenberger (2001:351) says, ‘Thus the destiny of the Holy City and the personal fate of the believer are intimately twisted together.’ In other words, blessing from the Lord depends in many ways upon the well-being of Zion, and so the good that happens to Jerusalem still validates the parallelism. Nevertheless, Goldingay’s suggestion is a welcome reminder that the verse can be understood in more than one way. He justifies his interpretation credibly too, saying that it is sensible if ‘the people who hear this blessing are pilgrims who would want the blessing that comes from YHWH’s presence there to extend to their homes in Judah and elsewhere’ (2008:512).

This is another occasion, it seems to me, on which it is not necessary to choose between the alternatives, as both are valid and the writer could reasonably have been intentionally ambiguous in order to suggest either or both.

[6]

Verse 6 prays for the blessing of seeing your children’s children. Such a blessing would mean on one hand that the preservation of line has been secured, and on the other that the blessed person experiences longevity. Depending on when the psalm was written and sung – if this psalm were exilic or post-exilic, for example – this promise may also have in mind the wish for lives not cut short by war. This is a likely implication given that it stands alongside the prayer for *shalom* upon Israel.

The final benediction appears elsewhere in the Psalms. Although it is generally translated as ‘peace’, *shalom* tends to be meant in a comprehensive sense, albeit often containing a stronger appeal for

the absence of strife. All of the previous blessings – enjoyment of the fruit of one’s own labour, a thriving family untroubled by untimely deaths, the good of Jerusalem – can be summarised by the prayer for national well-being, and would have been especially poignant as those blessings evaporated after the Exile.¹⁵⁶

If this psalm originated after 722 BC, it makes the reference to Israel more interesting, seeing as the northern kingdom and 10 of the tribes passed away at that time. Does the author envisage ideal Israel under the united monarchy? Is it therefore a prayer for restoration of the downtrodden nation to its golden age?

Krauss (1986:53) interprets **עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁלוֹם** as a statement of hope for redemption in the future and a prayer of anguish and longing, and he considers ‘Israel’ in the Psalms not to refer to their national identity, but to their distinctiveness as the people of God. Allen (2002:226) takes this even further, supporting a metaphorical re-interpretation of ‘Israel’ as ‘the faithful’:

‘The benediction calls down God’s blessing of good fortune upon the troubled people. A. Hurvitz... concluded that the formulation is later than sixth century BCE in origin... “Israel” stands for the faithful. Paul’s apparent echo of the benediction in Gal. 6:16 is true to the psalm’s limiting of the true Israel to those who conform with God’s will for their lives.’

There is plenty of evidence in scripture of the emergence of the theology of a faithful remnant within the wider group of God’s people, and so Allen’s position is not too fantastical, but perhaps Krauss’ suggestion is the more likely.

5.2.2 Structure

Psalm 128 divides scholars over how its structure should be understood, because the author of the psalm has built in an impressive array of symmetries and parallels across its length, and because verse 4 can be compellingly defended as either a conclusion of the first half or an introduction to the second.

Allen (2002:243) prefers the view that verse 4 is an introduction, and therefore that the Psalm divides into two parallel sections 1-3 and 4-6. He reasons that verse 1 and verse 4 are both in ‘ideal third-person speech’, and each is followed by two verses in ‘specific second-person language’. The

¹⁵⁶ Nehemiah 9:36-37 is illustrative of the absence of this psalm’s *shalom* in the conditions under Persian occupation:

‘Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.’ (ESV)

‘commendation terms’ (you are fortunate) in verses 1-2 are matched by two blessing verbs in 4-5. The two lines in verse 3 beginning with ‘like’ correspond to the two lines in 5b and 6a that begin with ‘see’. ‘The careful structuring of the present psalm has a ring of creative artistry about it.’ This analysis is largely followed by Goldingay (2008:508-510), who is persuaded that the ‘good fortune’ language in 1-3 and ‘blessing’ language in 4-6 is structurally decisive. He does, however, acknowledge that ‘perhaps [verse 4] constitutes an interlocking hook between the two sections.’ (2008:510)

Dahood (1970:229) believes that ‘fear of YHWH’ forms an inclusion, leaving 5-6 separate from the rest. Hossfeld and Zenger (2011:397) have made a more vigorous defence of this analysis against the views represented by Allen above. They are adamant that the language in verse 4 is summary in form, and that semantically (the use of the participle in both 1 and 4) this is more likely to intend ‘a division encompassing vv.1-4’. This part of their argument appears weak to me, as it is uncontested that verse 4 has summative qualities; the likes of Allen and Goldingay are merely arguing that these point forward to the details to follow. There seems to be no grammatical reason that this verse must be a summary conclusion rather than a summary introduction. Secondly, arguing on the basis of semantic parallels also fails to convince because both positions require (and can find) parallelism. If the debate requires settling, it needs to be done on the basis of content.

Allen’s argument divides the passage on account of the shift from talk of ‘good fortune’ to that of ‘blessing’. Hossfeld and Zenger argue that the form and content support the division at 1-4 and 5-6.

‘Verses 1-4 *describe*, from the perspective of wisdom theology, the ideal image of a happy family, while vv.5-6 *wish* the blessing of the God of Zion upon this family; in vv.5-6 the horizon of happiness expands both spatially from the borders of the nuclear family to Jerusalem or Israel and [temporally] ... through a sequence of generations, opening out to the extended family’ (2011:397, emphasis theirs).

I find this to be a better description of the content than the structure proposed by Allen and Goldingay. There is no reason that good fortune and blessing ought to be divided; theologically the family of YHWH would undoubtedly recognise that good fortune comes from YHWH as a blessing, and verse 4 seems to be making this explicit, connecting wisdom terminology with worship.

Secondly, if verse 4 is pointing forward to 5-6, it seems redundant to begin verse 5 with another pronouncement of blessing. Thus on the basis of content, this seems to be the preferable structure:

- 128:1-4 The ideal man of blessing
- 128:5-6 The pronouncement of blessing upon the nation

5.2.3 Synopsis

Psalm 128 draws wisdom language into contact with priestly blessing language, teaching that the good life is also the obedient life. The fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom in Proverbs is here made the beginning of blessing. The man of 'good fortune' is also the one who is found in relationship with YHWH and who follows in His ways, and good fortune itself is something with which one is *blessed* and which must be *sought*.

The description of this blessedness is at the same time simple, home-spun, and rural – focussing on a satisfying meal with one's strong and fruitful family – and *yet also* deeply rooted in national and cosmic soils. The description of enjoying the fruit of one's labour stands in contrast to the unyielding ground of Adam's curse, the fruitful wife bringing goodness out of the home is the ideal helper of Genesis 2, and the sons (and their sons) are the symbol and blessed future of God's faithful 'olive tree', Israel, and a tree of life to their father.

Politically, the Psalm addresses simply but profoundly the hope of a people whose history speaks so frequently of blessing slipping away, and the strife of slavery or foreign occupation. As a psalm in the mouth of people in exile, or scarred with its memory, it takes on the tone of a plea for restoration, a hope that once again they might ascend Mount Zion and feel streams of blessing flowing out of God's dwelling-place among them.

Thus whether in confidence that it is an observed reality or hope that YHWH will soon hear their prayers, the psalm ends with the benediction, '*Shalom* upon Israel.'

5.3 CAUSE-AND-EFFECT DYNAMICS IN WISDOM

Before continuing with the assessment of related texts, it is necessary to address the dynamics of wisdom literature. We have already noted the opinion of many scholars that wisdom literature and covenantal literature intend something very different by the phrase 'the fear of YHWH'. Underlying this is the view that there was a separate wisdom 'tradition' that arose from a different source and underwent a separate evolutionary development.

5.3.1 Separate development?

Westermann (1978:37ff) describes wisdom and covenant as separate traditions; he claims that wisdom is not connected to acts of deliverance or to Israel's redemption history. Whybray (1995:153) claims that scholars have 'widely assumed that the "wise men" thought to be the authors

of the wisdom books had no use for, or were at least indifferent to, [Israel's] "cult".' Crenshaw (1981:81) adds that the pragmatic world of wisdom had little room for grace ('indeed, to ask for special consideration approached blasphemy'), and he goes as far as to say that the wisdom worldview offered 'a viable alternative to the Yahwistic one' (1981:190).

Sneed (2011:52f) claims that the hard division between wisdom and covenantal traditions is largely attributable to Hermann Gunkel,

'[who] maintained that often a particular genre is associated with a specific social group and that this kept the genre pure. Kenton L. Sparks explains, "Gunkel presumed that each piece of literature belonged to only one genre, that each genre stemmed from one unique *Sitz im Leben*, and that the relationship between form and context was essentially inflexible.'"

Sneed continues that Gunkel pictured the wisdom school as a group of elders who sat in open squares or at city gates exchanging ideas that had been passed down to them, while young men were to listen and learn wisdom. Before Gunkel, German scholarship had held to a complementary view of wisdom's role in the canon. Schultz, for example, believed that wisdom's role was to take the basics of Israelite religion to develop it into 'a complete theory of life', and he maintained that it was founded on the 'revelation of God', especially the Torah.

Sneed (2011:59) argues that the problem with views of wisdom advocated by Gunkel and Crenshaw is that they confuse worldview and genre. They take wisdom to be a *worldview* that competed with traditional Yahwism. Sneed astutely points out that 'wisdom' in scripture is a *genre* of literature and that 'genres produce conventional worlds, not worldviews'. Switching between genres does not alter one's worldview. Texts that display mixed genre do not therefore 'contain two different worldviews simultaneously'. Sneed uses the example of the cultic genres germane to priestly activities. These would have been important to them, but that doesn't mean that their worldview 'was any more sacerdotal than that of the rest of the Israelites... Their worldview was broader than their profession and its related genres' (2011:60). The use of priestly material in priestly work does not mean that there was a priestly way of thinking that was utterly discrete from people of different roles. Why then would the wisdom genre require there to be a distinct wisdom school?

To add further doubt to the case for such a school, Whybray (1995:154) overtly claims that wisdom writing was a function of the temple, and Sneed (2011:62) lists a collection of scholars who similarly identify the temple or the royal court as the likely centre of operations for those scribes who produced biblical wisdom. Sneed (2011:63) then notes the biblical evidence for scribes who held multiple roles, even across 'traditions':

‘Often these scholars or sages would simultaneously occupy other roles or areas of expertise. Ezra was both a priest and a scribe. He was an expert in the law and a scholar, and he and the Levites taught the people the law... if Ezra was a scribal scholar, then why can we not fathom him, say, composing wisdom literature? Does being a priest preclude one from such an activity or competency?’

Finally, Clements (1995:275ff) has argued that although there is a relatively small representation of wisdom literature in the canon, wisdom thinking and method exerted influence in *shaping* the canon itself and the hermeneutics associated with it. Similarly, Sneed (2011:64) says,

‘The biblical materials’ common scribal matrix and the exposure of scribes to a multitude of genres and traditions are what discredit the notion of distinctive worldviews represented in the Hebrew Bible.’

The contention that wisdom literature *must* be a separate tradition because of the lack of importance given to covenantal ideas is also mistaken. Firstly, having accepted Gunkel’s view of wisdom, scholars dismiss biblical evidence that doesn’t fit. For example, when Ecclesiastes 12 concludes that it is man’s whole duty to fear YHWH and keep His commandments, scholars such as Scott (1965:194) claim that Qoheleth could not have made such a comments, and that it is an editorial addition. They often downplay how frequently biblical wisdom allows experience to be guided and chastised by revelation.¹⁵⁷ Secondly, Sneed (2011:69) argues that the argument that covenantal themes are absent is a weak one from silence, and ignores that while wisdom literature concentrates elsewhere than upon law, it nevertheless reinforces ‘the norms and values contained in the legal material. In other words, one could argue that the wisdom literature assumes covenantal notions without directly expressing them’. There may be much more symbiosis between these traditions (or genres of literature) than is usually acknowledged.

5.3.2 Cause-and-effect dynamics

Scholars who advocate the separate development of traditions tend also to consider the wisdom school to have believed in a universe that operated mechanically by cause and effect. This view is evidently still held with respect to Psalm 128. Having already argued that the fear of YHWH in wisdom literature is sharply distinct from the covenantal version (see page 167 above), Hossfeld & Zenger (2011:397f) identify verses 1-4 as a ‘cause-based blessing’. They say that such blessings include firstly the declaration of a happy state of the person or group in question, and secondly,

¹⁵⁷ While commentators frequently chalk off the conclusion to Ecclesiastes as an editor’s attempt at rendering the otherwise heterodox views of Qoheleth acceptable, there are, however, at least five other passages in Ecclesiastes in which Qoheleth renders similar conclusions, namely: 3:17; 5:1-2; 5:6-7; 7:26; 8:12-13 (c.f. Pickering, *Trivial Pursuit: Finding Pleasure in Ecclesiastes*, 2005).

‘description of the happiness, usually as a consequence or “reward” of the attitude of the person or group just described. These two elements constitute the so-called cause-and-effect relationship.’¹⁵⁸

In other words, the blessing guarantees by cause and effect that if you adopt a certain attitude, you will be rewarded with the good things that are listed. While it is possible that Israel’s sages advocated such a mechanical view of blessing – even today we have teachers who guarantee God’s blessing in exchange for demonstrations of faith or obedience – I would suggest that there may be another way of understanding the confident promises in biblical (especially proverbial) wisdom.

5.3.3 The purpose of wisdom literature

As a broad generalisation, wisdom is concerned with the search for the ‘good life’, i.e. the most successful, pleasurable, and virtuous way to live. Hubbard (1996:1244) says,

‘[Wisdom] is intensely practical, not theoretical. Basically, wisdom is the art of being successful, of forming the correct plan to gain the desired results. Its seat is the heart, the centre of moral and intellectual decision.’

Crenshaw (1981:17f) notes that wisdom aims to discern the ‘right time for a specific word or deed’. Wisdom literature, he adds, is therefore the ‘search for and maintenance of order’, which focuses on the ‘good act’: the appropriate action at its proper time (1981:19). Wisdom includes discernment and propriety, and infers its principles from patterns of observed reality as well as covenant norms.

Goldsworthy (2000:338-341) points out that one of the self-proclaimed aims of wisdom and wisdom literature is ‘giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young’ (Proverbs 1:4). Among other things, this includes: the skill of decision-making; the way in which people use their minds; and conforming thought and behaviour to God’s way. Wisdom is the search for the orderly and successful path of life, but it aims at achieving successful living by instilling the skill of discerning God’s order. It is more important to make the reader wise than to give him words of wisdom. Wisdom literature is not a competing set of laws; its genre is for provoking thought.

To this end, wisdom literature employs a number of literary devices that invite the reader’s participation in the reasoning process. For example, Proverbs encourages its reader to derive principles of living from analogies (‘Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise,’ 6:6,

¹⁵⁸ The insertion of quotation marks and the modifier ‘so-called’ leaves open the possibility that the authors do not fully give assent to the view they are presenting; yet it is fully consistent with the view of fear that they offer without irony (‘[God] rules the universe and brings success on the path of life to those who seek to recognise the proper order of life and act in accordance with it’), and they do not otherwise try to distance themselves from the ascription of this cause-and-effect dynamic to ancient wisdom.

ESV); to multiply alternatives ('There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him,' 6:16, ESV); to learn discernment from paradoxes ('Answer not a fool according to his folly...' 26:4; Answer a fool according to his folly...' 26:5, ESV); there are also riddles, parables, and several other devices that force the reader to ask questions rather than to consume ready-made answers. It is through inquiry and contemplation that new patterns of thought are learned.

Thus, when we encounter categorical statements about the various ways in which the righteous and the wicked live, it is hasty to judge them as universal laws or even divine promises. When blessing is described as the result of the path of righteousness, it is hasty to conclude that the sages believed these statements to be true without qualification. As the lessons of life, however, they describe general patterns of order in the world that 'the simple' can add to the data of experience in order to inform their thinking and choices. One learns to be wise through the observations of others, even if those observations are broad and without guarantees.

The reason why we assume that proverbial wisdom is making promises rather than conveying generalisations or ideals may have something to do with the Western affinity for the abstract – a love that the Hebrew mind did not share. Hubbard (1996) says,

'The Hebrews' characteristic resistance to speculation and abstraction frequently led their poets to deal with inanimate objects or ideals as though they had personality.'

In this way, the Proverbs may read like promises to us, or like simple statement of cause and effect, because they are broad ideals that have been made concrete.

Example: Is prosperity a reward for righteousness?

A pertinent example comes from Proverbs 13:21-25. It reads:

²¹ Disaster pursues sinners,
but the righteous are rewarded with good.

²² A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children,
but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.

²³ The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food,
but it is swept away through injustice.

²⁴ Whoever spares the rod hates his son,
but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

²⁵ The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite,
but the belly of the wicked suffers want.

This collection of proverbs is bookended by those that – when read as promises – would seem to be guaranteeing good to the righteous and misfortune to the wicked. However, if read in this way, verses 21 and 25 make a nonsense of the intervening proverbs. Verse 22 tells of a wicked man who enjoys riches, not want. The bad fruit of his wickedness has to do with his inheritance going elsewhere (which perhaps means he is childless or his family line is cut off at some unspecified time). Verse 23 seems to suggest that a poor man may be held in poverty by the unjust who carry off his potential, presumably for their own enrichment.¹⁵⁹ Verse 24 raises the idea that suffering hardship may be fatherly discipline, not cosmic punishment.

It is clear in these verses that there is no simple relationship between righteousness and reward. If we may assume that the compilation of these proverbs is not arbitrary, then it is clear that the conjunction of ideas that do not readily cohere is intended to provoke thought about inter-relationships that are far more complex than can be captured by a handful of maxims.

5.3.4 The advantages of a covenant-compatible view of wisdom

There are a number of advantages of this view of wisdom literature over the one that sees cause and effect as the operating principle.

- It avoids the obvious complaint that it takes only the most rudimentary powers of observation to see the challenges to such a rigidly mechanical system in the real world. I would take issue with Grunwaldt (2006:11) and Westermann (1978:62-63) who both make a case that the book of Job represents a ‘crisis in sapiential thought’ arising late in Israel’s history, as though the concept of the suffering of the righteous represented a new wave of criticism of the old schools of thought (represented by the four friends). On the contrary, it is quite likely that the thinking represented in Job *always* existed alongside proverbial positivism, discouraging people from misunderstanding wisdom literature and making exactly the mistake of the foolish friends, who thought that God’s order is easily discerned.
- It requires no rigid separation of schools of religion in ancient Israel. The idea that the fear of YHWH can feature so prominently in covenantal religion and in wisdom literature, yet without overlap in meaning strains credulity. This is especially the case when the schools

¹⁵⁹ Unless it intends to mean that the poor man is wicked and the injustice is his own, and thus his fields will not support him. This is unlikely given how common an idiom is the mistreated poor man.

responsible for wisdom traditions are often connected with the scribes of the royal court¹⁶⁰ or even the temple itself. Would two crucial cultural centres – the court and the temple – operating in the same city and invoking the covenant name of the same God really resist all cross-pollination of ideas?

- It explains the co-operation between the two ‘traditions’. If there isn’t the insistence upon a mechanical dynamic to wisdom, it reduces the tension between Proverbs and Job, and between Proverbs and the grace-based stories of redemption. It removes the need to explain away passages in the mouth of Qoheleth, for example, that appear too priestly or covenantal. It makes logical room for Clements’ suggestion mentioned above that wisdom schools are likely to be responsible for the shaping of hermeneutics and the canon itself.¹⁶¹ It also explains the happy conjunction of wisdom literature and prayer for blessing that appears in Psalm 128.

Therefore, I would judge that it is a mistake to impose upon wisdom literature a paradigm that insists it is non-covenantal – which owes its popularity to presumptuous work of Gunkel and claims as evidence the relative quiescence of covenant themes – and that insists that it operates according to a mechanical ethic of reward for good and retribution for evil. This latter arises out of the assumption that wisdom literature describes laws for living, rather than didactic tools for the easy transmission and memory of cultural norms, and training in the skills of wisdom itself.

I would also not advocate a view of covenant in which an earlier cause-and-effect-based view underwent a crisis – and subsequent redevelopment – due to the shocks of northern and southern exiles (seen for example in the views of Westermann [1978:62-63], in which the book of Job is a reflection of that crisis). I prefer the view that covenantal Israel always had a role for the wisdom genre, and that the wisdom genre always had room both for cause-and-effect generalities and divine mystery (inherent, for example, in Job). God’s justice demands that there is retribution, but the fear of the Lord recognises that judgement and blessing must be left to the wisdom and timing of YHWH; it is a matter of human trust in God, not mechanical causality.

¹⁶⁰ For example, Hezekiah’s scribes take the credit for the collection beginning in Proverbs 25.

¹⁶¹ I would certainly have no hesitation in advocating that Torah is not intended as an exhaustive code, but intends that the faithful should meditate upon it and apply its principles more widely. To do this in a way that is faithful to YHWH’s character and will requires *wisdom*. Conversely, statements such that the fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom surely imply that whatever wisdom is available to all mankind, *ultimate* wisdom needs to be shaped by the knowledge of God. This is nowhere more clearly available than in His self-revelation in the Law and the Prophets.

5.4 INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Let us now assess concepts from related texts in the Psalms that are relevant to this chapter.

5.4.1 All blessings come from God (Psalm 127)

Many commentators regard Psalm 127 and 128 to be a pair (e.g. Boice, 1998:1124; Allen, 2002:195). Both are psalms of ascent, and although Psalm 127 bears fewer obvious characteristics of wisdom literature, it is brought into relation with wisdom traditions (and especially the adjacent wisdom psalm) by its ascription to Solomon. Furthermore, both psalms share themes of blessing (especially of sons), the house, and the city.

Despite the thematic overlap, there are relatively few similarities that would commend these psalms as partners; they are not formally or stylistically related. Thus the reason for bringing these psalms into contact is most likely because Psalm 127 brings further theological balance to the absolutism of Psalm 128. Verses 5-6 of Psalm 128 serve to moderate the positivity of 1-4 by refocusing gifts of prosperity upon the Giver in prayer. Psalm 127 provides the same corrective pre-emptively by stating emphatically that one's labours or the building of houses and cities cannot succeed unless God is actively the Builder. The psalm describes human efforts as hopeless without the Lord's prospering of those labours:

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. (127:1, ESV)

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep. (127:2, ESV)

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD... (127:3, ESV)

So, Psalm 127 makes it clear that blessings of the order promised in 128 rely entirely on YHWH. It promotes dependence upon Him and reiterates the relational aspect that is at the heart of blessing ('His beloved', verse 2). Besides the implied need for dependence, Psalm 127 provides no other requirements that must be met. Psalm 128 is stronger on human responsibility:

'Psalm 127 aims to show that blessings come from God alone. This psalm [128] emphasises human responsibility to fear and obey.' (Boice, 1998:1124)

Therefore, in concert the Psalms sketch a more complete picture of the mutuality of relationship that underpins all blessing.

5.4.2 The fear of YHWH (Psalm 111)

Another psalm pairing – Psalms 111 and 112 – bears similarity to our chosen psalm and helps to address more clearly some of the issues raised therein. Both the psalms are acrostic, and similarly to the pairing of 127 and 128, the second psalm contains more overt wisdom characteristics than the first. Similarly again to 127 and 128, the first psalm is given one feature by which it can be more explicitly linked to the wisdom writing to follow. In this case, Psalm 111 ends with the classic declaration concerning the beginning of wisdom:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise¹⁶² endures forever! (Psalm 111:10, ESV)

The important contribution of Psalm 111 for our purposes is the meditation on the content of the fear of the Lord. It fills out in detail what is meant by this fear, and includes:

- Whole-hearted thankfulness (111:1).
- Praise for YHWH's righteous and majestic work (111:1, 3); His grace and mercy (111:4); His faithfulness and justice (111:7); and His holy and awesome name (111:7).
- Commitment to the covenant and its laws (111:5, 8, 9).

In addition, the psalm acknowledges the gifts that YHWH gives to His covenant people, including food (v5), the 'inheritance of the nations' (v6, ESV), and redemption (v9). Although food, for example, is given 'to those who fear Him' (v5), there is far more of a sense that the covenant responsibilities given to people are *responsive* to God's works, rather than meriting reward. For example, the praise in mind here is identified specifically as thanksgiving for His past works (v1); study of His works similarly is responsive to past acts that have provoked the delight of their beneficiaries (v2); redemption and covenant are past acts (v9); and the precepts that are 'to be performed' have already been 'established forever' (v8).

Therefore, the fear of YHWH in this psalm is clearly covenantal and rooted in past acts of redemption, and yet it is also overtly conjoined to the path of wisdom (v10). Moreover, there is minimal grounding of blessing in a mechanical cause-and-effect system, and maximal basis in historical covenant acts.

¹⁶² Psalm 112 cements the connection by prefacing its **אשר** formula with 'Praise YHWH!'

5.4.3 Wisdom and justice (Psalm 112)

Apart from sharing acrostic structure, Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 both begin with ‘Praise Yah!’ and share a number of common themes and terminology. The former emphasised the righteousness of YHWH, focusing on ‘the way YHWH has related to the community’ (Goldingay, 2008:309), and ending with the exclamation, ‘His praise endures forever.’ Psalm 112 emphasises the justice of the one who fears YHWH, focusing on the character of the individual, and declaring of *His wise follower*, ‘his righteousness endures forever’ (v3, 9, ESV).

The psalm begins similarly to Psalm 128 with an אֲשֶׁר־יִירָא formula. Allen (2002:130) says of these,

‘The opening commendation formula creates the perspective of the whole psalm. It is used in wisdom literature to refer to an ideal to emulate; it is an implicit exhortation since it offers congratulation to those who comply. What follows (especially in 112) is a kaleidoscopic definition of the incentives and lifestyle of the type of person here praised. Respectful obedience of YHWH’s will revealed in the Torah is set forth as a worthwhile virtue to emulate.’

Psalm 112 is significant in this regard because of its role in commending the Torah. It again reinforces the synergy between wisdom and covenant traditions. In this case, it is not merely to say that the wise man fears YHWH and keeps His commandments (although that is the clear statement of verse 1), but it also demonstrates in what way the covenant produces wisdom.

The psalm teaches that social justice, moral uprightness, mercy, and generosity are all components of true wisdom as well as the covenant. In other words, God’s character expressed in His covenant is also the character that the wise man imitates. The psalm demonstrates this by the parallelism of typical covenant behaviour with typical wisdom results. For example:

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
who greatly delights in his commandments! (112:1, ESV)

Wealth and riches are in his house,
and his righteousness endures forever. (112:3, ESV)

It is well with the man
who deals generously and lends;
who conducts his affairs with justice. (112:5, ESV)

Furthermore, folly is demonstrated to be the absence of justice and generosity of spirit. The wicked person is the one who despises the works of the righteous, is full only of desires for self-gratification, and goes to the grave in anguish.

The second important contribution of Psalm 112 comes in the area of cause-and-effect mechanisms. In proverbial wisdom it is commonly taught that the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer; in this psalm, that pattern is evident (in the comparison of verses 3 and 10, for example), but also far more nuanced. Little is said of the wicked man; he is not said to suffer or to fail, and he may well be prosperous while he lives for all this psalm tells us. Yet with whatever hand he is dealt in life, we see that the curse of his folly is that he is forever unsatisfied, a slave of his desires. He dies tormented. The unhappy fruit of his folly seems to be made exclusively internal.

By contrast, the righteous wise man is said to be blessed and to enjoy abundance (הוֹן) and riches (עֶשֶׂר), both of which are put in parallel with his enduring righteousness. It is unclear whether we are therefore supposed to see that there are material fruits of righteousness, or that the riches in question go far deeper than mere money. This verse should probably be read along with its counterpart in verse 9, which also declares his enduring righteousness. Where in verse 3 there is mention of great riches, in verse 9 there is evidence of great *generosity*. There is wealth in his house, but he distributes it freely.

Importantly, there is also evidence that he does not enjoy uniform blessedness. Kuntz classified Psalm 112 as realistic wisdom – ‘it frankly admits that the righteous suffer’ (Allen, 2002:131). Evidence for this can be seen in the following excerpts (all ESV):

‘Light dawns in the darkness for the upright...’ (112:4)

‘He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.’ (112:7)

‘His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.’ (112:8)

Although these are all phrased positively, it is clear that there is darkness for the upright person; and there is not an absence of bad news or reason for fear or enemies, there is simply the steady heart of faith formed by the covenant that is able to transcend suffering.¹⁶³

Thus there is no guarantee of unbroken happiness and prosperity for the righteous man, and no guarantee of the suffering of the wicked. However, while the wicked man bears the emptiness of his folly inwardly, so also the relationship with YHWH bears the righteous man up until he is vindicated.

¹⁶³ Psalm 49 is even clearer in its declaration that *wisdom* dictates that being rich is *not* coextensive with being blessed. In this psalm, the rich man is the one who has forgotten YHWH and set his eyes firmly on things that are perishable to the neglect of his soul. True insight recognises that YHWH’s redemption is the only thing of value.

5.4.4 Zion as Eden (Psalm 46)

I have argued in the analysis of Psalm 128 that there are possible references to the Creation / Fall narratives in the blessing of enjoying the fruit of one's labour, and possibly even in the fruitful wife as the ideal helper. This is very much a minor theme, if it is intended at all, and Psalm 128 contains no explicit connections between Jerusalem, the Promised Land, or the Garden of Eden.

However, in the mention of Zion there may be some relationship. Krauss (1986:80) argues that Zion theology includes evocative images of the Garden of God. He cites Psalm 46:4 as an example of Zion being spoken of in Edenic terms. He says:

‘Ps. 46:4 refers to streams which “make glad the city of God”... It should be noted that Ps. 68:9 and Isa. 33:21 also speak of “streams” in Jerusalem and that Joel 3:18; Ezekiel 47; and Zech. 14:8 provide impressive parallels... Gunkel and Gressmann were the first to recognise that these texts contain mythical metaphors and concepts of a paradise, a garden of God, which were transferred to the city of Jerusalem. The garden of God is described in Genesis 2, where streams are also spoken of.’

Thus, perhaps it is possible for us to import into the Zion terminology of Psalm 128 connotations of the Eden concept: a place prepared by YHWH for the fruition of divine-human relationship.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

Let us draw together the conclusions derived from this chapter.

5.5.1 The content of prosperity: Broad scope of blessing

It is clear in Psalm 128, and those cited in connection with it, that blessing includes things that are firmly material – there is the promise of plenty, good things, food, riches, etc. Added to this are promises of progeny, security, longevity, and satisfaction. The blessings include the individual and the nation, with ‘the good of Jerusalem’ and ‘*shalom* upon Israel’ expanding its scope.

However, there are not merely superficially material blessings in view. It is likely that underlying the promise of a good meal is defiance of the Fall of man itself: the curse of the ground no longer applies to this blessed person.

Furthermore, if it characterises the post-exilic mood, it is possible to detect in this psalm a spirit of yearning, especially in the prayer for *shalom*. It is a request for total well-being that encompasses all the blessings already enumerated, but if in the context of hardship and enmity, it becomes more particularly a prayer for deliverance and restoration to conditions of rest and plenty.

5.5.2 The ethics of prosperity: Generosity

Psalm 128 makes no specific contributions to the ethics of prosperity, but it is noteworthy that Psalm 112 – another wisdom psalm – puts the issue of justice and generosity at the heart of the character of the wise fearer of YHWH. His delight is in the commands of YHWH, and so he practices righteousness and grace. What wealth he has is directed towards the good of those in need. It is the wicked who are characterised by misplaced, perishing desires.

This serves as a fine example of Sneed's contention that wisdom literature reflects the norms of the covenant (2011:69). This psalm cements the ideas encountered especially in Deuteronomy that relationship with YHWH is intended to be at the centre of human desire, not the gifts that He offers; furthermore, those gifts are intended for the mutual good of all. A theology of prosperity that is consumed with material blessings is in danger of looking past the Giver, and is thus more likely to approximate the 'perishing desires' of the wicked man in the psalm.

5.5.3 The environment of prosperity: The Promised Land

Psalm 128 makes no case for an environment of blessing, but it does identify Zion as blessing's headwaters. However, if Krauss is correct that Zion theology in Psalm 46 and elsewhere includes the reappropriation of 'Garden of Eden' ideas – such that Zion becomes the walled paradise that God has prepared for His communion with people – it can perhaps be argued that the emphasis in later Jewish writings upon Jerusalem as the place of God's presence represents a narrowing of focus of Promised Land concepts. The original Garden of Genesis 2 became a Promised Land for Abram in Genesis 12, and eventually the City of God becomes the embodiment of the hope in God's life-bringing presence among His people.

5.5.4 The sphere of prosperity: Relationship

Psalm 128 reiterates that prosperity belongs within the appropriate divine-human relationship firstly by emphasising the primacy of the fear of YHWH and walking in His ways. Thus all of the benefits invoked in this psalm depend firstly on being properly related to God and seeking to know and to imitate His character. Secondly, the relational sphere is addressed again in the shift from description of 'good fortune' language to 'blessing' language. It recognises that God is the giver of favour; man is not the earner of reward. The psalm is therefore both an appeal for Israel to know and obey God, and a plea in prayer for God to intervene and to bring about their restoration to good fortune. Psalm 111 and 112 further underline God's gracious works in history to redeem His people, and the

corresponding ideal human response of faithfulness, justice, and generosity to others. The blessed of YHWH understand their redemption and delight to do His covenant.

5.5.5 The dynamics of prosperity: Absence of cause-and-effect

While wisdom literature provides the clearest case for the operation of cause and effect in the dispensation of prosperity, it is my position that these ‘promises’ of prosperity in exchange for good behaviour communicate only in general terms, not as ‘spiritual laws’. In general, of course, it is true that those who please God experience His favour, and those who revile God live in danger of His displeasure. It is a mistake to read wisdom literature as making guarantees that these generalities will become the concrete experience of each individual in the specific ways described. They represent patterns of real experience, not promises.

In terms of our passage, therefore, it does not seem to me to be imperative that verses 1-4 teach non-covenantal fear of the Lord, nor that following in His ways guarantees riches and fertility to each individual that does so (at least not in the literal ways that the passage describes). These verses describe the ideal beneficiary of God’s blessing, but the blessings are not limited to what this ideal man enjoys, and nor are his blessings guaranteed to all. The ideal is a pattern to which many of the blessed will perhaps conform, but each instance depends upon the grace of the God who gives all things in the measure that He sees fit. The state of blessedness of this man is a stylised description derived from the sage’s general experience, and it demonstrates that – of the available options – following YHWH is the path of ultimate wisdom (even if it is intermingled with suffering), and vastly superior to the others, even if they appear to have wisdom of their own.

Psalm 112 contributes important qualifications to the promises of other wisdom psalms. It demonstrates both that hardship remains a possibility for the righteous man, and also that blessing can frequently be an *internal* benefit that remains unimpaired by outward troubles. In the midst of darkness, reasons for fear, and adversity, the man who fears YHWH knows light, and calm, and strength. The wicked man may or may not prosper in this life, but without the wisdom of YHWH he goes to the grave in anguish. Blessing and curse may transcend external appearances.

Hence it is entirely appropriate that Psalm 111 presses us to remember that YHWH is the source of all true good and success, and it is appropriate that Psalm 128 ends in *prayer* for blessing. Wisdom dictates that following Him is the only path of life that can ever truly prosper, but knowing God in *this* world is far more complicated than can be captured in a handful of pithy maxims.

While the wisdom sayings may appear to give certainty that the good life is yours once conditions are met, this is not their aim. They are didactic tools, not bank-guaranteed promises. They are stylised ideals that reassure travellers that they've chosen their path well. However, the path itself may prove more difficult for some travellers than others. Prosperity is not mechanically dispensed to the faithful by cause and effect.

Because of who YHWH is in His covenant dealings with people, it is essential that His people pursue relationship with Him for His sake, and seek grace, and that the path on which YHWH takes them leads to their *ultimate* good, not merely to the meeting of unsatisfying material desires.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

It remains for us to draw together the conclusions of these exegetical studies, and to discuss how they might contribute to a positive, coherent theology of prosperity that is of use to the church.

6.1 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

From the exegesis and the intertextual investigations, we can distil the following observations.

6.1.1 The content of prosperity: Broad scope of blessing

1. Prosperity is an expression of God's liberality

The canon of scripture begins with chapters that allow us to see YHWH's generosity at work in Creation. The first chapter of Genesis repeats His declaration that the various components of His creating are 'good', and the second chapter describes the special preparation of a garden in which mankind could enjoy that goodness and walk with God.

By Genesis 12, paradise has been lost and regular pronouncements of curse have eroded away the goodness that was given at first. God's pronouncement of the intention to bless Abram's family intentionally addresses the loss of Eden to curse, and it demonstrates that goodness and generosity is a characteristic of His that He delights to express.

We discover other hints that there is this cosmic self-expression underlying promises of prosperity. For example, in Psalm 128 the blessing of enjoying the fruit of one's labour stands in contrast to the first curse affecting man: the curse upon the ground that brings hardship, unfruitfulness, and frustration in his labour. Blessings such as this one indicate that it is God's wish to do away with curse and to restore the expressions of goodness that He built into Creation at the first.

2. Prosperity includes (but is not limited to) the material

In each of the passages we have examined, there is ample evidence that blessings in the Old Testament are frequently material.

In the Patriarchal narratives, blessing is focused upon the individual, but this is *representative* of God's intention to fulfil His promises, not typical of their fulfilment (Blomberg, 1999:36); the actual fulfilment of the Patriarchal promises in the Mosaic covenant has the nation in view: a communal scope rather than an individual one. For example, the promise of a 'great name' for Abraham becomes the fame of the nation that bears YHWH's name and law (Deuteronomy 4:6-8); and God's promise to bless such that there is no poverty among them is clearly not a promise to the individual, because in that very passage is the guarantee that some would remain poor. For the promise of prosperity to be fulfilled, individuals must share so that the *nation prospers* (Deuteronomy 15:11). This is expressed similarly in Psalm 128, in which the invitation to enter into the ideal man's good fortune issues finally in petition for YHWH to bring about the good of *Jerusalem* and the *shalom* of *Israel*.

The Old Covenant presents an overwhelming majority of its blessings as material. It is important to note, however, that even in the description of the *New Covenant* in Jeremiah 31 and 32, the tendency to describe prosperity in material terms persists. It includes wine, oil, fertility, and so on, as if a return to Eden-like conditions – free of threat or rebellious relapse.

Prosperity includes material blessings, but it is not limited to these. It is often meant as a comprehensive idea, touching all aspects of inner and outer life: happiness, security, satisfaction, successful endeavour, family, national peace, etc. The whole-heartedness with which Deuteronomy encourages YHWH's people to love Him is matched by the comprehensiveness with which YHWH blesses them. It is matched also with a corresponding weight of curse for those who hate Him and pursue idolatry.

Furthermore, the prosperity of the one who fears YHWH can frequently be an *internal* benefit, such that the blessed person is able to transcend outward troubles (e.g. Psalm 112).

3. Prosperity is delight in YHWH

Perhaps the most important contribution to the content of prosperity comes from Jeremiah 31:12-14, which claims that material abundance is directed towards delight in YHWH's goodness. Even if the 'goodness' is a reference to things and not to a characteristic of God, it still makes *Him* the

source of our delight, and not the goods themselves. What one gains in the receipt of good things is an apprehension of the nature of the God who blesses. That is the prized content of prosperity.

6.1.2 The ethics of prosperity: Generosity

1. Prosperity aims at blessing all nations

The narrative shape of Genesis 1-12 allows us to read the blessings of Abram in the context of the curses that precede them. The previous 11 chapters establish the predicament into which mankind has been thrust, and Genesis 12 is the (somewhat surprising) promise of a solution. The promise that all nations will be blessed by what God does with Abram's line is therefore almost certainly an indication that the blessings are *goal directed*. The aim of prospering Abram was eventually to attain the ultimate restoration of all.

Prosperity, therefore, is not firstly self-directed; it has a missional element. Abram's attempt to secure blessing for himself succeeded that far, but it led to curse upon Egypt and thus must be judged a failure.

2. Prosperity is to be used in service of YHWH

Deuteronomy 6 exhorts the love of YHWH with heart, soul, and strength. The inner life of God's people must be directed towards Him and His service. However, given that the 'heart' encompasses the desires, and given that 'strength' encompasses the means at a person's disposal, this command is unequivocal that prosperity must be tool of the love of God.

3. Individual prosperity is communal prosperity

If prosperity as a 'tool of the love of God' is too abstract for us, many of Deuteronomy's laws provide concrete examples of how this was intended to look. Tithes and sacrifices provided for the Levites and those in poverty; leaving gleanings in the field provided subsistence for the poor; and laws of release from debt ensured that inequalities were rebalanced every seven years.

These laws were not primarily for social welfare; the goal was to instil a culture of generosity. Chapter 15 is interesting in this regard, because it establishes that God's plan to prosper all His people communally involved intentionally distributing resources *unevenly* on an individual level. The fact of unequal distribution is the basis for the command in 15:11 to open wide one's hand to the

poor. God gives plenty, but in a way that necessitates that His people *participate* in the grace of giving and receiving.

This establishes that the mechanism of God's blessing is communal generosity among His people, which in turn suggests that there is a test inherent to the receipt of prosperity: having much demanded giving much; withholding help from others made one an agent of curse.

Psalms 112 describes the blessed man as a generous person, giving his wealth freely to those in need. It says of such a person that his 'righteousness endures forever'. By contrast, the wicked man is characterised by selfish desires. Passages such as Amos 2:6-16 and 4:1-3 lay the blame for coming exile at the door of the rich who *exploit* the poor for greater riches. In so doing, they exchange grace for greed and thwart God's promises of blessing. Jeremiah 33 tells of the New Covenant age in which David's 'Branch' would restore justice and righteousness, such that Jerusalem would be renamed 'the Lord is our righteousness'.

6.1.3 The environment of prosperity: The Promised Land

1. The land is the environment of promised blessing

The blessings to Abram are given in response to the problem of the curse by which Eden was lost. Just as Adam was placed in a fruitful garden prepared by God, so also God sends Abram to a special land in which he will be blessed with good things. There seems to be a conscious parallel between Canaan and Eden.

Just as Adam had free access to all the garden's goodness but no ownership of the garden itself, so also Abram's descendants would be 'given' the land to enjoy, but not to own. It is the place in which blessing would be enjoyed, but like Adam, Israel could be evicted by its true owner. So the land is not just one of the material blessings, it is the place that God prepared for His people to enjoy blessing and relationship with Him.

The land can also be seen to be the environment of blessing – or at least to occupy a unique relationship to blessing – when it is used as a synecdoche; i.e. it stands as the representative of blessing as a whole. It plays this role, for example, in the key phrase from Deuteronomy 6 and Jeremiah 32: 'It is a land flowing with milk and honey.'

2. The land is the exclusive environment of promised blessing

It is harder to prove that the land is to be understood as the *exclusive* environment of blessing, but it is at least important to note how close our texts come to saying this.

Firstly, this connection is implied in the wife-sister stories of Genesis in which the Patriarchs each have occasion to choose between hardship in the land or seeking their fortune outside it. Abram and Jacob both choose the latter, with Abram leaving for Egypt and Jacob returning to his ancestral homeland. Both find prosperity there, but only through the exploitation of relationships and even curse upon the hosts. By contrast, Abram forbids his servant to allow Isaac to return to Haran – the way Jacob would go – and God Himself tells Isaac told not to leave the Promised Land for Egypt, because it is God’s intention to bless *in Canaan*.

Deuteronomy places all hopes for blessing in the Promised Land if there is relationship, and sets up a mirror-image of curse that culminates in ejection from the land if there is on-going rebellion.

Jeremiah 32 puts hope for restoration in a New Covenant, but crucially does not attempt to locate this covenant in a new land or in a conceptual, spiritual ‘kingdom’. It doesn’t follow His chosen people to wherever they are. Restoration means restoration to God’s land. God’s *presence* is not limited to Jerusalem – He is there even in Babylon – but it is His ‘*dwelling place*’ with man that is represented by the Promised Land, not merely His presence. The promises of blessing are only valid in the place where God chooses specially to dwell with people.

The corollary can be seen in Jeremiah 29. Prosperity can be sought in Exile – if the city prospers, the exiles too will prosper – but the receipt of good is contingent. To be in Exile is to be in a time of punishment and waiting; to dwell outside the Promised Land is to dwell in a place of darkness.

Restoration, therefore, centres upon the return to the land. Jeremiah 32 describes this final restoration as being *planted in the land* unreservedly.

The Old Testament never says, ‘When you are outside the land, the promises of blessing no longer apply,’ but there are certainly strong hints that blessing relies upon being with YHWH in the place that He has chosen to bear His name. Perhaps it is more important, then, to limit ourselves what we can say with certainty from the Old Testament: Jeremiah 31-33 speaks of New Covenant restoration as being ‘planted in the land’ permanently, which in turn means that blessing is poured out unreservedly upon God’s people in His place. This is made possible because the human heart is unmixed; relationship between God and man is perfected such that sin no longer threatens to turn prosperity into curse.

3. The land is where God is

Jeremiah's description of New Covenant conditions did not come to pass when the Babylonian exiles eventually did return to Canaan. There was neither unreserved blessing, nor was there the unblemished relationship of obedience to God from the heart. This demonstrates that although Jeremiah would not dissociate blessing from God's land, the important thing about the land is not its geographical location but its chosenness by God. Thus, it is not Canaan itself that is essential;¹⁶⁴ it is only the Promised Land if He dwells there, and God's return to His people still lay in the future. The preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus involves the announcement of restoration and end of Exile, which reveals that being in Canaan can still be viewed as an exile if it is without YHWH's rule as sovereign over His people.

Psalm 128 (and Zion theology in general) also suggests that the important thing about the Promised Land is not the place, but its role as the dwelling place of YHWH. The ideas of great streams flowing from Jerusalem, God's dwelling place in the sanctuary, and blessing emanating from Zion all represent a refocusing of Promised Land concepts upon the city of God as His chosen place. The environment of blessing is whatever borders circumscribe the place that bears His name.

6.1.4 The sphere of prosperity: Relationship

1. Covenant and promises are about relationship

The descriptions in Genesis 2 and 3 of God walking and talking with man in Eden establish from the beginning that He intends to relate personally to human beings. However, Adam rebels and hides from God, and he is cast from God's land.

The call of Abram requires him to leave his homeland and extended family and to start a new relationship as YHWH's family in YHWH's land. He enters a similar relationship to that which Adam lost. When more formal covenant language is eventually used, Genesis 17:7-8 describes its purpose as God being his God, and Abram and his seed being God's people.

¹⁶⁴ After all, Eden is the forerunner of the Promised Land, but Abram was not invited to re-enter its walls; he was promised another place. God may choose the nature and location of His dwelling with man, but it is *that* place of which blessing is promised.

2. Properly ordered relationship centres on grace and dependence

Deuteronomy 6 provides a lot of detail to describe the nature of relationship with YHWH. God's relationship to man can be summed up as 'grace'. The passage emphasises that they were chosen while they were slaves, and again it reminds them that they were not chosen because of inherent worth: they were the least of all peoples; it reiterates that the good that they were to receive had not been earned. At the centre of the chapter, the reason for obedience to the law is provided; it is the grace of their redemption from slavery in Egypt. It emphasises that God redeemed them powerfully in order to bring them in to the land, 'a land flowing with milk and honey'. In Jeremiah, that phrase is repeated again, in connection with a people who are about to be cast out of the land for all their rebellion and idolatry, but despite all their evil, YHWH promises to bring them back, and to restore them, and to give them all the prosperity that He promised to His covenant people.

Man's relationship to God can perhaps be summed up as 'dependence'. Deuteronomy commands YHWH's people to:

- Obey divine command embodied in the law, which demonstrates submission to Him as God
- Fear YHWH, which is the goal of the commandments; it implies reverence, loyalty, and love
- Love YHWH with their whole heart, which takes obedience beyond mere matters of compliance; human response to God was intended to involve inner desire, the will to love

Deuteronomy 8:3 adds that 'man does not live by bread alone'. It is His word that truly brings life. This is a clear picture of dependence upon covenant relationship for life itself.

Genesis 12 also centres on dependence. Abram was invited to go to God's land in trust, which he duly did. However, he is shortly thereafter tested to see whether he would genuinely trust God's promises to protect and provide, but he failed to do so. God proved true to His word, and kept His promise to curse those who dishonoured Abram.

Psalms 128 also emphasises that the fear of YHWH – walking in His ways – is primary. All of the good things promised in this psalm belong to the man who is properly related to God and who imitates His character. That the psalm ends in prayer for God's blessing is a demonstration of reliance upon Him for His grace.

3. Relationship with rebels requires testing

An important element to the divine-human relationship is testing.

God promises good things to those who are in relationship with Him. Unfortunately, because humans are sinful by nature, we tend to hear in that promise that there are valuables on offer if only we'll meet some sort of condition. In fact it is the *relationship* that is most valuable, and the good things that attend it are there because of who God is.

Since people are prone to loving gifts and forgetting the Giver, and since the gifts are not an end in themselves, God tested His people in order to shape the dependence that the relationship demanded of them.

Abram provides an example of someone who put the gift before the Giver, and attempted to secure good for himself instead of trusting God's promise to bless. He leaves curse and chaos in his wake, demonstrating the danger that attends the pursuit of prosperity apart from God.

Deuteronomy 6 refers to the testing at Massah to make a similar point. This time it was the people conducting the test, because they doubted His will or ability to bless them. Having witnessed His power in redemption, they behaved as though He were the unreliable one. Thus their 'test' is effectively compounding their doubt, ingratitude, and lack of dependence by turning these into an accusation against God. Israel's relationship with God ought to have been founded on remembrance of His great works in the past, and to have exhibited trust *in spite of hardship* because of God's promises and faithfulness.

Psalm 112 provides an illustration of the ideal Israelite as the man who faces trouble with a firm heart because his trust is in the Lord.

Testing aims to forge in people a desire for divine relationship for its own sake, not for the associated benefits. For as long as people remain prone to wandering and doubt and idolatry, testing is an essential corrective.

4. Prosperity will be enjoyed fully in the New Covenant relationship

According to Jeremiah 30-33, there will be a new basis for relationship. The corruptibility of the human heart that makes testing necessary – and that through repeated unfaithfulness eventually left the Old Covenant in tatters – will be cured. The relationship will be perfect, from the heart, unbreakable, and unconditional. Under these relational conditions, God is able to give prosperity unreservedly and without threat. Thus, promises of prosperity in the New Covenant require that sin is dealt with.

6.1.5 The dynamics of prosperity: Absence of cause-and-effect

1. *God gives just reward*

The idea that God gives reward and punishment consistently to those who deserve it generally stems from the assertion that His justice guarantees it. Clearly there is no fault with this generalisation: God is just, and He will ensure at least that the wicked receive what is due to them.¹⁶⁵

Wisdom literature teaches cause and effect, with its confident statements of good for the righteous and punishment for the wicked, in so far as this is a general principle that can be observed. However, even wisdom literature demonstrates considerable complexity in thinking about justice. Recompense is true, generally observable, but still subject to the ultimate wisdom, timing, and mystery of God.

Prosperity and suffering may be distributed on the basis of recompense, but they are not *always* given on this basis, and they may be worked out in various ways. People who please God, work hard, deal justly etc. may well be given success, and those who hate God and do evil may meet obvious punishment from God, but this need not be the case. God often brings about His good and His justice in unpredictable or even secret ways, and in His own time.

2. *The righteous suffer*

It is clear in scripture that the works of the righteous are often repaid with undeserved hardship or suffering. Abram's unequivocally faithful and courageous response to his call meets with famine in the land that was meant to yield prosperity.

In Deuteronomy 15, the call for the rich to be generous to the poor suggests that it is God who *intentionally* distributes unevenly; there is no hint whatsoever that the beneficiaries of wealth were being rewarded and the beneficiaries of poverty punished. As a lesson in grace, God's distribution of wealth is likely to have been done without regard to spiritual merit.

Psalms 112 demonstrates also that hardship remains a reality even for the righteous man.

¹⁶⁵ Being a God of grace, He gives good things to those who don't deserve it, and His justice is satisfied by other means.

3. The undeserving prosper

It is clearer still in our passages that prosperity may be given to the undeserving. Abram is again a key example: at the lowest ebb of his trust in God's promises, Genesis 12 declares the success of his plan to secure prosperity for himself.

Similarly, as we have already said, grace not reward is the basic characteristic of God's dealings with His people. He specifically did not favour or bless His people because of their merit or their inherent value, but in spite of those things. Deuteronomy 6 and 7 declare that they were a slave nation and the least of all peoples when God rescued them and gave them an inheritance, a land that they had no role in building or growing. The emphasis in chapter 6 is on how *little* they deserve their gifts.

In Jeremiah 32, Hanamel receives the prophet's financial help though the investment is lunacy and the beneficiary belongs to a family group who had been plotting Jeremiah's murder. YHWH's speech to Jeremiah later in the chapter emphasises that it is the *judgement* of the nation that is thoroughly merited, and yet it is God's intention to restore and bless anyway. He will even create the heart change necessary to make that restoration possible.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's kindness to an undeserving people is predicated on account of His promises to the Patriarchs. Even if there were something worthy about the Patriarchs that meant they deserved the blessings, it was not they who received their fulfilment. Yet the people who benefitted from the promises and received entry to the land are said to have been given this gift on account of their forefathers, and not at all because of their own merits.

God's justice is measured in His own time and in His own way. Success is not a reliable indication of God's favour, nor failure His displeasure.

4. Prosperity is a test

As we've said, testing is a necessary part of God's dealings with corruptible people, because it forges the right sort of relationship. When hardship comes as discipline, therefore, it is not a sign of God's displeasure; He says the opposite: Like a father with his sons, He disciplines those that He loves.¹⁶⁶

What is perhaps even more counter-intuitive is that prosperity – even as a gift of God – can be a test of fidelity. For example, in Deuteronomy 6, good gifts from God such as the land that the people

¹⁶⁶ Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12

were set to inherit should lead to His praises, but may lead to them forgetting the Giver on whom they actually depend. Satisfaction gives way to self-satisfaction, and ultimately idolatry. Similarly, Deuteronomy 7:25-26 notes that greed for wealth is a related test. Moses warns against coveting the gold and silver out of which the idols are made, which tests their resolve to honour the command of God above the allure of easy riches.

The Jubilee (Leviticus 25) promised a miraculous harvest on the sixth year so that the people and land could observe a year's rest on the seventh. This tested whether the people would honour the seventh year rest or use it to grow even richer. God's uneven distribution of wealth also serves as a test of the rich: would they show as much grace as they were given, or would they hoard good for themselves without regard for the needs of others?

Therefore it is clear that the wealthy man in Israel may have been anywhere between an idolater and an exploiter of the poor, and a man blessed by God eagerly passing on what had been given for the benefit of those in need. Conversely, the poor man may be lazy, wicked, and wasteful, and justly suffering the fruits of his folly; or he may be a man of inner strength, faithfully enduring difficulty, but suffering the lack of care of his neighbours that God intended for him. The God of justice will indeed right wrongs and bring about fitting ends for all people, but there is no barometer available to men by which that can reliably be measured.

6.1.6 Summary statement

From the exegesis of these four key chapters and related texts, I offer the following statement in summary of the theology of prosperity of the Old Testament.¹⁶⁷

1. Prosperity is a gift that represents the God of grace

In Creation and in His dealings with man, God expresses Himself primarily by means of grace. Giving prosperity to His people reflects His characteristic liberality. His blessings are comprehensive, encompassing all realms of life, including material things, and they ought to produce in their beneficiaries delight in YHWH Himself. God's covenants are founded on grace and directed towards personal, familial relationship with a community of people. As such, His blessings are primarily communal before they are individual.

¹⁶⁷ As a reminder, this is a tentative statement due to the limitations of the scope of this study.

2. Prosperity belongs in a relationship of dependence and imitation of God

God's goal is relationship with a community that delights in Him. Relationship of the kind He desires is the essential sphere of prosperity; it includes dependence, fear, obedience, heartfelt love, trust, and imitation of God.

Prosperity shares the character of the divine-human relationship, and so it is therefore also goal directed: it teaches grace (the blessed are to be a blessing to all nations, and riches are provided to some so that they may imitate God's grace in generosity), and it teaches dependence (delight in the Giver, and engagement of the totality of one's resources in whole-hearted love and service of Him).

3. Prosperity is promised in association with the place that bears His name.

The Garden of Eden was God's specially prepared place for relationship with the human community. Rebellion and corruption led to the punishment of exile. The blessings in Genesis 12 inaugurated God's plan to counteract the curses that ruined Eden. The Promised Land becomes God's specially prepared place in which His name dwells, and blessing comes about by this association with His name in His chosen place. His people are to live under His promises *there*. Leaving the land is usually associated with slavery and curse.

Exile is not the opposite of being in Canaan; it is the opposite of being in the place in which God's name dwells. The New Covenant continues to place hope in the restoration of the land, but its fulfilment relies upon the eradication of human corruption.

4. Prosperity is only unreserved in the absence of sin and corruption

When human corruption meets prosperity, it leads to love of the gift above the Giver. Therefore, testing is a necessary tool to shape genuine relationship between man and God.

Grace and testing both militate against a mechanical system of reward and punishment. Prosperity is not reliably the result human righteousness, and neither is hardship caused by wickedness. The simplicity of cause and effect is out of place in the complexity of a relationship of Holy God and corrupt people. Prosperity remains a good gift that reflects God's grace, but it is a trial and a snare to man until such time as human corruption is finally dealt with.

6.2 CONTRIBUTION

The goal of this research was to examine whether a consistent and coherent biblical theology of prosperity could be formulated in terms of the Old Testament. The following is my evaluation of the progress made in this goal, as well as my evaluation of the contribution of this thesis to Old Testament studies.

6.2.1 Progress

I stated at the outset that the methodology employed in this research was imperfectly suited to the development of a complete biblical theology, but given that treatments of this subject tend to be shallow and/or reactionary, the approach was nevertheless necessary. Thus there has never been hope of *proving* the stated hypotheses to be true. My more modest goal was to demonstrate that apparently disparate perspectives on prosperity in the Old Testament – at least those evident in foundational chapters and related texts – could be shown to be consistent and complementary if certain propositions are given proper weight.

This, I think, has been satisfactorily demonstrated. Without special pleading or too much stretching of credulity, I have shown that the body of texts considered (whether in exegesis or in broader survey) all give prime place to the forging of appropriate relationship with YHWH as the goal of His interactions with sinful humanity. Prosperity belongs to His ultimate intentions for His people, but only as an accompaniment to that relationship.

Similarly, all texts have uniformly connected the fulfilment of Abram's blessings to the Promised Land. There may be an argument to be made that God promises blessing outside of the land, but this is a matter of further research: nothing in this vein has presented itself in the texts considered, nor has any such text been intentionally avoided. We have discovered that when prosperity is achieved outside of God's blessing it is regularly associated with curse, and though prosperity is available in Exile it is only as a contingent offer, not as a promise; being in Exile is a period of waiting for restoration and never an environment of the fulfilment of blessing.

Finally, all texts have made prosperity a matter of God's grace, and not of reward or mechanical cause and effect. Even the simple exhortations to obedience and resultant blessing in Deuteronomy and the general assurances of prosperity for the wise in texts of the wisdom genre do not simplistically promote mechanical thinking. Grace to the undeserving is the underlying foundation of obedience in Deuteronomy, and Psalm 128 balanced the sage's declarations of good fortune for

fearers of YHWH with *petitions* for such blessing. The general observations of prosperity in wisdom literature are also not simplistic: they are counter-balanced with descriptions of the success of the wicked, and suffering and apparent failure of the righteous.

So, the aim of developing and defending theological propositions that are essential to a biblical theology of prosperity can be judged to have achieved success. The propositions need to be tested more broadly, but they produce a coherent and consistent view of prosperity across the limited number of texts that we have examined.

In 6.3 *Suggestions for Further Research* below, I have raised some areas of New Testament study in which such testing needs to be done, and I have made some brief suggestions as to how I see the biblical theological propositions defended in this thesis interacting with some of those texts. This brief exercise shows further promise that this hypothesis may be successful more broadly.

6.2.2 Contribution

In terms of the contribution of this thesis to Old Testament studies, I suggest the following:

- The theme of prosperity pervades most of the Old Testament, and yet theological treatments tend to be limited to the polemical. I will not claim that a positive theology of prosperity is unprecedented,¹⁶⁸ but certainly there is a dearth of literature on the subject that is disproportionate to its importance.
- The biblical texts dealing with blessing and prosperity are numerous and the perspectives contained therein are many and complex; I believe that the five key propositions about prosperity defended in this thesis are specific enough to be useful, but flexible enough to explain variety. This description of the basics of prosperity is – as far as I know – unique to this study.
- Some of the exegetical observations recorded in this study were not (consciously) derived from the work of other scholars. The structure of Genesis 12, for example, is something that I observed from my own work on the text¹⁶⁹ and is not as far as I know represented in any commentaries on the book. Original insights, if there are any that are valuable, may help to advance our understanding of these chapters.

¹⁶⁸ Nor that my thesis has entirely avoided polemics.

¹⁶⁹ Only after a number of rethinks and rewrites of the Genesis chapter; many thanks to my professor for repeatedly telling me to do the chapter again.

6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As a biblical theological study, this thesis is limited by its narrow scope within the Old Testament. The principles that I have attempted to describe and defend by means of detailed exegesis require further testing across the canon.

What follows is a survey of some important texts and concepts from the New Testament and some directions in which this biblical theology of prosperity may be taken for further research.

6.3.1 Connection of Old and New Testaments

The way in which Old and New Covenants are similar and different is a matter of disagreement, but there are at least two areas of connection that are important to the theology of prosperity that I would like to sketch here.

1. The promises to Abram

According to Paul, the Patriarchal promises of the Old Covenant also underlie the New, and Jew and Gentile Christians are heirs together of Abraham's blessings. For example:

'And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.' (Galatians 3:29, ESV)¹⁷⁰

Thus it is right that we should examine the New Covenant to determine in what way promises of land, blessing, offspring, etc. are fulfilled, but doing so depends on this being a theological view that is shared by other New Testament writers. These areas require research and reflection.

2. Exile and restoration

The Old Testament conceives of the end of Exile as partially completed in the return to Canaan, but still awaiting final fulfilment in which blessing is poured out. The way in which the New Testament resumes this theme is therefore critically important.

According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus came announcing 'the time is fulfilled' (Mark 1:15), and Jesus' early preaching in Luke's Gospel cited passages of Isaiah to proclaim 'the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4:18-19). Seccombe (2002:158ff) has shown that this phrase initially referred to 'Jubilee' but

¹⁷⁰ See also Romans 4:11-12; 9:7-8; 15:8-9; and Galatians 3:7-8.

became associated with the nation's future hope in return from Exile, freedom from oppression, redemption from sin, and the restoration of the land of their inheritance. The mentions in Luke 4 of 'the Poor', the release from captivity, and the giving of sight to the 'prisoners' also all have eschatological significance as symbols of New Covenant restoration (2002:161ff).

Jesus' preaching therefore demonstrates that He viewed His arrival as the beginning of a new age for Israel, the fulfilment of prophetic hope, and His miracles – such as healing the sick and feeding multitudes – spoke powerfully of the restoration of Israel's well-being and prosperity. However, strangely, the New Covenant was begun in His *death* (Matthew 26:28), and the promised Holy Spirit could only come after His departure (John 16:7). Just as one element required for the fulfilment of Israel's expectation arrived, another moved further out of reach.

Before Jesus' ascension in Acts, the following conversation takes place:

[The disciples] asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"
He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'" (Acts 1:6-8, ESV)

It is clear that the disciples realise that fulfilment of New Covenant prophecy has stopped short; however, by deferring fulfilment to the future rather than correcting them, Jesus acknowledges that the promises are incomplete. Society is not under the rule of YHWH and His King, and although the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon God's New Covenant people it is evident that the full extent of what is promised in the realm of divine-human relationship in Jeremiah 30-33 has not yet taken place either. Christians are not incorruptible, there is no absence of conflict, and New Testament warnings against idolatry still abound.

To borrow the famous terms attributed to Gerhardus Vos, there are elements of New Covenant promise that are 'already', and there are elements that are 'not yet'. Christ's invitation into the kingdom is a beginning, but not an end.

For the teaching of prosperity, then, it is clear that much of the hope in prosperity remains in the 'not yet' category. The New Testament clearly believes that prosperity still presents a danger to Christians, even in texts that postdate Pentecost, and so God will be free to prosper when we are free from sin, and when wealth no longer has the power to draw our eyes away from Jesus.

The Exilic church

Although Jesus announces the end of the Exile in His coming, it is also true that His coming is a two-part event. His kingdom preaching represents partial fulfilment of the promised restoration, but even before His death, His parables suggest that the ‘Master’ is going on a journey that will last ‘a long time’ (e.g. Matthew 24:48; 25:5, 19). Final fulfilment of restoration is still to come.

Paul describes the final fulfilment in this way:

‘Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.’ (ESV)

For this reason, the paradigm by which the apostles seem to think of the state of the church is *still* that of Exile. Paul describes enemies in that land that still need to be defeated, such as Death (1Corinthians 15:24-26). Peter addresses the recipients of his first epistle as ἐκλεκτοὶ παρεπιδημοὶ διασπορᾶς (to ‘elect exiles of the dispersion’, ESV), which appears to be a title that he gives to even Gentile Christians.¹⁷¹ The writer to the Hebrews describes people of faith as those who ‘acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth’ (11:13).

The exilic paradigm applies also to YHWH’s self-imposed exile from among His people. Brueggemann (1977:142) describes YHWH’s return from exile as a key component of the restoration, with YHWH returning to the temple ‘in the same manner in which He left it’. He cites Ezekiel 43:1-5:

Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple. (ESV)

As we’ve argued, this did not happen when the exiles reoccupied Canaan, a fact to which post-exilic prophecies attest (e.g. Malachi 3:1). But even for us, fulfilment is not a simple event. There is fulfilment in the coming of Christ, who is in a sense the ‘temple’ of God in His very person; there is fulfilment in the coming of the Spirit, who builds the church as a ‘temple’ of God, and yet we also await the final fulfilment of this promise when Christ returns again and the city of God has no temple but YHWH Himself (Revelation 21:22). This is further caution that we should not be hasty to adopt a

¹⁷¹ Paul certainly has no hesitation in applying Jewish distinctives to Gentile Christians (e.g. Romans 9:6-8; 11:25-26; Philippians 3:3), and this seems to be Peter’s intention too.

kingdom paradigm – certainly not too fully – when it remains true that the paradigm of Exile is still very much in force, and bidding us to wait for full restoration still ahead. More research into the role of prosperity while in New Testament ‘exile’ is warranted.

6.3.2 Land

The already-not-yet nature of return from Exile is true also of the New Testament understanding of the Promised Land.

As we have argued, the Promised Land is primarily the place in which YHWH has specially caused His name to dwell, and which He has prepared for covenant relationship with His people. It has been fashionable in the last century or more to consider the New Testament to have *spiritualised* the land, such that it is now a moral kingdom (cf. Seccombe’s survey of approaches, 2002:167), or that ‘the theme of land was displaced by the person of Jesus Christ’ (Brueggemann on WD Davies, 1977:170).

Brueggemann (1977:170) contends that, no matter how much it has been spiritualised, this transformation of the land idea in the New Testament should never be ‘robbed of its original, historical referent’. The theme of ‘kingdom’ in the New Testament never abandons the idea of a ‘historical, political, physical realm, that is, land’ (1977:171), and ‘Jesus’ ministry is to restore the rejected to their rightful possession (1977:172).¹⁷² Similarly, Seccombe (2002:174ff) has argued convincingly that the idea of ‘realm’ cannot be divorced from the meaning of ‘kingdom’ and replaced with ‘rule’ or ‘reign’. The elements of land and people are inalienable. In Jesus’ thinking, the kingdom is something that one enters into.

‘It is hard to resist the impression that Jesus saw the kingdom, partly at least, as a community... But it is also something which one receives; something wonderful which it is possible to miss out on. Israel’s promised inheritance naturally springs to mind’ (2002:178).

Given that this land element is still something that belongs to the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom promises (cf. Acts 1:6), I would suggest that we can also only conceive of our connection to the Promised Land in a very partial way. The New Testament is clear about when and how it conceives of Christian possession of the land: the New Covenant Promised Land is an inheritance kept for us until its *descent from heaven* in fulfilment of final restoration. Our Promised Land is the heavenly Jerusalem.

Hebrews 11 is an important passage in this regard. This chapter speaks of Abraham believing in a Promised Land that could only ever be fulfilled in the future beyond him, thereby demonstrating

¹⁷² He also identifies passages that continue to address Christians with promise of inheritance. For example, Romans 4:13 speaks of Abraham’s descendants as those who would ‘inherit the world’ (cf. Romans 8:17).

that his eyes were on ‘a better country’. Verses 13-16 then generalise this principle for ‘the person of faith’, describing believers as exiles whose Promised Land is a city:

‘These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.’ (ESV)

This perspective is shared by the book of Revelation. Revelation 3:11-13 and 21:1-5 identify our hope in the inheritance of the coming New Jerusalem, which descends as the final place of God’s dwelling with man, and the fulfilment of Abrahamic promises.

Clearly in the church we receive the *start* of the new community of the kingdom and the foretaste of our landedness, but we do not inherit the land until Christ returns.

This has several important implications for the connection of prosperity to the church age that warrant further investigation:

- *Prosperity belongs within the Promised Land and therefore in our future.* We have argued in this paper that promises of prosperity have always been associated in a near-exclusive way with the Promised Land. The fact that our Promised Land is an eschatological hope means that our *promises* of prosperity also belong to this future. Certainly there is little doubt that we need to be particularly circumspect about what privileges we claim now as Christians.
- *Prosperity now is contingent, not promised.* Jeremiah 29 appears to allow that prosperity can be sought in Exile – if the city prospers, the exiles too will prosper – but the receipt of good is contingent and a matter of the mercy of God, not a promise that He is bound to honour. There is however a warning implicit in this. Many of the exiles who were taken to Babylon did manage to make a success of their lives there, so much so that when the edict was issued that allowed exiles to return to their homelands, only a very small number decided to go back to the Promised Land. Many decided that the good they already had in Babylon outweighed the risky hope of a ‘better country’ they weren’t sure existed. As we will discuss shortly, there remains an inherent danger in prosperity that it causes people to forget. Be careful what you wish for.

- *Is the church age a time of 'conquest'?* The self-conception of the New Testament church almost certainly includes exile, but it may also include the metaphor of conquest. The New Testament hints at it by frequently employing soldiering imagery,¹⁷³ yet Brueggemann (1977:142) says of Ezekiel's ending (47:13 – 48:29) that it views the age of restoration as a period of conquest: 'the return to the land and the reappropriation of the promise are presented after the manner of the land distribution of Joshua. The land has been conquered again by YHWH'. In other words, there seems to be a parallel drawn between the Conquest under Joshua and the final inheritance of the Promised Land of the New Covenant. Is it too much of a stretch of the metaphor to suggest that the Great Commission may be considered the equivalent of the conquest of 'enemy-occupied territory'?¹⁷⁴ The Conquest metaphor offers a more dynamic self-concept for the church; it has room for the 'already-not-yetness' of church experience; and it envisages the church as a people *en route*. We enjoy some of the fruits of the land, but there is work to be done before we can fully inherit rest.
- *Zionism is not the only alternative to spiritualisation of the Promised Land.* We have noted that Jeremiah resisted the urge to spiritualise the Promised Land, but insisted upon a physical return to *Canaan*. This was not because the Promised Land is fixed geographically but rather because the New Covenant is a *restoration* of the promises not a *redefinition*. Nevertheless, that definition remains focused on the Promised Land as God's specially prepared place in which He has chosen for His name to dwell. It moved from Eden to Canaan once, and so there is no inherent contradiction in the idea that the prophets could insist upon a return to Jerusalem *and* that this Jerusalem could be a city that must still descend from heaven.¹⁷⁵ For this reason, I must sharply disagree with Christian Zionists who see in the modern state of Israel some sort of fulfilment of promised restoration.¹⁷⁶ Locating the

¹⁷³ E.g. Luke 22:36; 1Corinthians 14:8; Ephesians 6; Philippians 2:25.

¹⁷⁴ In further defence, Jesus claims that he has come to bind 'the strong man' in order to carry off his possessions (Matthew 12:29), and he seems to make allusion to the Conquest (e.g. Deuteronomy 6:10-11) when He describes the disciple-makers task as entering into that for which they did not labour (John 4:38).

¹⁷⁵ However one wishes to interpret this. I take it that it is a metaphor of new creation; in other words, 'Jerusalem' will exist when God makes His dwelling with mankind in the new heavens and earth.

¹⁷⁶ For example, Kaiser wrote advocating the association of the Promised Land with modern day Israel:

'The land of Israel cannot be reduced to a sort of mystical land defined as a new spiritual reality which transcends the old geographic and political designations... Instead, the Bible is most insistent on the fact that the land was promised to the patriarchs as a gift where their descendants would reside and rule as a nation.' (1981:302)

'The ownership of the land (as a gift from God) is certain and eternal, but the occupation of it by any given generation is conditioned on obedience.' (1981:307)

'For Paul, no one of the previous promises has changed — not even the promise of the land... the permanency and directness of the promise of the land to Israel cannot be contravened by anything allegedly taught in the New Testament... For Paul, Israel's restoration to the favour and blessing of God must come in "full number"...

Promised Land in the New Creation accounts for the partial return and partial non-return of the exiles, for the exilic paradigm assigned to the church, and for the eschatological hope in the restoration of Jerusalem. None of it requires a nationalist revival of the state of Israel. There is clearly the need for more research into the New Testament land concept.

6.3.3 Relationship, idolatry, and testing

In the realm of covenant relationship, we see again that the ‘already-not-yet’ principle is valid. We have argued that the theology of prosperity in the Old Covenant is dependent upon properly ordered relationship with YHWH: God primarily relates with grace, and people are expected to respond with recognition of His sovereignty and dependence upon Him. This relationship is primary, and all other benefits of the relationship are subordinate to its establishment. The human side of this relationship broke down in the Old Covenant, and this led to prophetic pronouncements of a New Covenant in which the human heart would be incorruptible and incapable of jeopardising the relationship again.

In the New Covenant, therefore, we expect to see continuity in the relational emphasis upon grace and dependence (cf. Ephesians 2:8) and in conceptions of the covenant (cf. Revelation 21:3). The New Testament also teaches that work has been done in the hearts of God’s people (Galatians 4:6). However, it is evident that the final fulfilment is still future, because ours is not an incorruptible will, and relationship of the New Covenant type is underway but incomplete (cf. 1Corinthians 13:12). This is the reason for much of the complexity in New Testament teaching about prosperity: it is good, it is coming, but the prerequisite relationship is not yet finalised.

Attention needs to be given to the following New Testament issues:

1. Relationship is threatened by wealth

The very fact that the New Testament teaches that prosperity is able to be a snare to us means that this is not yet the age in which God has promised His unrestrained blessing. Consider these texts:

‘But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of

Thus Israel is and remains God's link to her own future as well as the link to the future of the nations. For if her temporary loss of land and failures have fallen out to the spiritual advantage of the world and their reconciliation to God, her acceptance will signal her “life from the dead” (11:15). “And so all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26)... it is a matter of God's activity in history when the nation shall once again, as in the days of blessing in the past, experience the blessing and joy of God spiritually, materially, geographically, and politically.’ (1981:309f)

evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.’ (1Timothy 6:9-10, ESV)

According to this famous text in 1Timothy, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Teachers often gleefully respond that it’s not money itself that is evil, but the *love* of it. However, we are generally slow to acknowledge how easily we do love it. In Mark 10, the ‘rich young man’ is required to relinquish his wealth before being allowed to follow Jesus, and he is unable to make that sacrifice; in Luke 14:33, Jesus makes this same demand upon all of His disciples.

Wealth prompted the Israelites to forget God and to love the gift more than the Giver (Deuteronomy 6:12). As much as its proponents may claim that they do not love money, the sort of gospel that advertises that ‘God wants you rich’ depends for its success on its audience finding that message appealing; yet 1Timothy 6 identifies even ‘the desire to be rich’ as a snare. The eyes are already on the gift, and the Giver will not settle even for close second place in the affections of His people.

Matthew 6:19-24 claims that money is able to occupy an idolatrous place in life. Even though there is a sense in which it would be absurd to ignore in our teaching all of the good things that God does have in store for His people, we need to be extraordinarily careful how we present such motivations. The conclusion of Matthew 6:19-24 (‘You cannot serve God and money’, ESV) assumes that the idolatrous person is not singly devoted to money, but rather that he loves God and imagines that he can somehow love money a little too. On the contrary, says Jesus, loving money is hatred of God. Motivating our gospel appeal with the promise of riches is inviting people into a snare rather than into the freedom of knowing God. It is in serious danger of promoting covetousness, which Paul tells us is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Wealth is a danger.

Rather, the gospel appeal should beware of confusing where the value of the covenant lies. What we gain when we enter into the covenant is not chiefly access to the ‘storehouses of heaven’ or to other promises of blessing. What is most important is the privilege of *knowing God*. We gain relationship. Our gospel should reckon that to be the central piece of good news on offer.

Luke 12:15-21 tells a parable about a man who is judged to be a fool, because when receiving a bumper harvest that leaves him rich, he makes plans to administer it well and live off of it for many years. The man in the story does nothing morally wrong. If it were in any other context, most of us would judge that he has done well to plan for his future. Jesus says that he is at fault, and that fault is the failure to be rich towards God. Accumulation for oneself and materialism are both detrimental, because they provoke forgetfulness of God. The man is a fool because he has arranged

his life according to the meeting of bodily needs and not according to the kingdom. The wise man prizes YHWH and directs his life towards richness in that relationship (cf. Revelation 3:14-18).

2. Testing is still a tool of relationship shaping

The fact that divine-human relationship is still threatened by ‘forgetting the Lord’ means that testing is still appropriate. For this reason, the New Testament considers hardship and testing to be good (Hebrews 12:5f; James 1:2-3).

Interestingly, wealth itself is reckoned as a test of faith. In the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20), the ‘thorns’ that choke the seed of the word may be hardship or wealth. James 1:9-15 also suggests that wealth is among the trials to be endured and the desires to be resisted. For this reason, it is appropriate to receive hardship with rejoicing, and to receive prosperity with fear. The former supplies perspective and the latter desperately needs it.

3. Suffering is relational

A New Testament theme that is particularly difficult to reconcile with prosperity theology is that of suffering. Yet, if we understand our present church paradigm as one of exile and conquest, and the promises of prosperity as belonging to final restoration, then the difficulty is much reduced. We do not expect a life of good things, because those promises belong to our homeland, and we expect hostility because we reside within ‘enemy territory’. This seems to be the cause of suffering in Philippians 1:29-30 and 2Timothy 2:3-4, for example.

But there is still less trouble in understanding suffering when it is understood in relational and missional roles. Counter-intuitively the New Testament regards suffering as intimately tied up with grace. It is viewed as such in connection with fatherly discipline that teaches endurance and character (Romans 5:3-5); and it is part of the grace of being able to imitate the Saviour (Romans 8:16-18; Philippians 3:10-11) even as partners in redemption (Colossians 1:24-26; 1Peter 2:18-23; cf. 1Peter 3:13-17 and 1Peter 4:12-16).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ In 1Peter 4:14, he says, ‘If you are insulted for the name of Christ, *you are blessed*, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.’ It is rare that we would associate suffering and blessing in any way, but Peter does so here. I would interpret him to mean not that the suffering itself is a blessing, but that bearing the name of Christ should be held up as a blessing *in the midst* of suffering, because it means that glory awaits at the end. Nevertheless, juxtaposing blessing and suffering in this way is a scandalous thing to do, and clearly intends to provoke his reader to fresh perspectives about the place of suffering in the Christian life.

6.3.4 Ethics

In the New Testament we find the same complex of attitudes to prosperity (especially wealth) that are present in the Old: wealth is seen as both good and bad, the wealthy are blamed for injustice and apostasy, 'the poor' are praised, generosity is enjoined, community prosperity is the ideal.

Jeremiah 33 describes the New Covenant age as one in which David's 'Branch' would restore justice and righteousness, such that Jerusalem would be renamed 'YHWH our righteousness'. Again this is clearly subject to the 'already-not-yet' principle: Christ has come to restore righteousness and begun the process, and yet disciples still need to be exhorted to exhibit righteousness and warned about falling short of the mark.

1. The wealthy are associated with injustice

In continuity with the old prophets, the New Testament is content to associate the rich with injustice, seemingly even rich people within the church (e.g. James 2:6-7; cf. 5:1-4). Social inequality continues to thwart the purposes of God to spread the goodness of His kingdom to all, which seems to be the reason why James calls the unjust rich man a blasphemer of the honourable name (James 2:7).¹⁷⁸ Such is the danger that James urges the rich to delight rather in their humiliation than in their wealth (1:10), and Paul urges them rather to be rich in good works (1Timothy 6:18).

This is not to be viewed as cynicism about prosperity in general, or as a vendetta against the rich. The correlation between the rich and injustice is logical – in combination with the corruptible human will, wealth threatens to produce greed, and greed is a cruel and insatiable god that feeds on injustice; the rich have more power and greater opportunity to exploit the weak – but it is injustice that is the problem, not wealth. There are plenty of well-off Christians in the pages of the New Testament who escape the condemnation of their peers. The attitudes to the rich are at home with the teaching of Deuteronomy and the prophets, all of whom were promising wealth with the next breath, and consistent with eschatological promises of prosperity.

¹⁷⁸ I.e. I reckon that it may merely be their behaviour that blasphemes Christ, not necessarily additional verbal blasphemy.

2. True religion

Running parallel to the negative message about wealth is the positive exhortation to generosity, which again complements Old Testament teaching well. There are a number of ways in which generosity can be seen to be central to true faith in Christ.

- *Generosity is true religion.* James 1:27 virtually makes care for the poor and defenceless into the very definition of true religion. It serves to elevate relationships above accumulation, and it refocuses attention upon the ultimate grace of the Giver.
- *Generosity is still God's plan for communal prosperity.* Jesus' allusion to Deuteronomy 15 in defence of a woman's generosity – 'For you always have the poor with you,' (Mark 14:7, ESV) – certainly affirms it as a praiseworthy virtue, but the allusion may also reiterate that God intends for His people to care for the poor among them in the way that Deuteronomy 15 describes.
- *Generosity teaches imitation of Christ's grace.* The prior grace of God is still the motivation for New Covenant generosity, and we learn grace through participation in giving and receiving. For example, 2Corinthians 8 describes the eager desire of the Macedonian churches to give financial aid – even out of their own poverty – to Christians caught in famine. 8:1 describes their generosity itself as grace of God given *to them*, and 8:5 describes it primarily as a gift of *themselves to God*. In 8:9, Paul explicitly locates the model of Christian generosity in the self-sacrificial giving of Jesus to us.¹⁷⁹ It is surely because generosity causes us to participate in grace that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35).

3. The prosperous community

The final point of connection of this doctrine of prosperity with New Testament ethics is the proper place of material prosperity in the New Testament interim. In continuity with Deuteronomistic perspective, prosperity should be communal.

In addition to Jesus' allusion to Deuteronomy 15, He promises in Mark 10:29-30 that those who surrender everything for the sake of the gospel will find that they have gained in the church family a

¹⁷⁹ Ironically, while some have no doubt seen in this verse a promise of great riches for the follower of Christ, if you observe the argument that it makes in its context, its message is actually that the Corinthians should be willing to impoverish themselves financially in order to show Christ's love to their needy brothers and sisters suffering famine in Jerusalem, just as Christ impoverished Himself for our salvation. He left the riches of heaven so that we might one day gain them with Him, and so we should leave behind our earthly claims in order to supply the lack in our brothers and sisters. See also 2 Corinthians 6:8-10.

hundred-fold what was lost.¹⁸⁰ This suggests that the church is a place in which there is community of property, and meeting one another's needs in this way is exactly what the early church is reported to have practiced (Acts 2:44-45).¹⁸¹

This imperative of radical generosity in order to create a church community in which the rich do not gather too much and the poor too little cuts against our capitalist urge to make a virtue out of private property and the desire to incentivise achievement with prosperity. However, as Wong (2012) has forcefully argued, disproportionate reimbursement for labour depends upon certain skills being valued at certain points of history. He quotes billionaire Warren Buffett as saying:

'If you stick me down in the middle of Bangladesh or Peru or someplace, you find out how much this talent is going to produce in the wrong kind of soil ... I work in a market system that happens to reward what I do very well – disproportionately well.'

By contrast, highly valued occupations that are necessary to a healthy society sometimes pay very little. Stay-at-home mothers, for example, get paid nothing. Wong also points out that there are no 'self-made men'. Every rich man relies upon poorly paid workers to provide infrastructure, cheap labour, and protection, etc. all of which is required for the production of wealth in the first place.

In Christian terms, the rich in the church should be cognisant that their wealth has been generated by the abilities with which *God* gifted them, and that it depends heavily on the community of which they are a part. Generosity should be practiced not just because we need to learn grace, but because it is a recognition of the interdependence of the communities that God has brought together.

I close with the words of Maria Bingemer (2004:73f):

'The whole of the New Testament, the New Covenant of God with his children, brothers and sisters of Jesus, points to the sharing in and practising of justice, to the distribution of material goods, as the necessary conditions for brother- and sisterhood amongst the children of the one Father... An exaggerated attachment to material goods, the refusal to share them out among the poor, can impede the radical following of the Lord (Mt 19:16ff). The gospel ideal to be attained, the prefiguring on earth of the definitive kingdom, when God will be all in all, is the construction of a fraternal society, founded on justice and love. For the Gospel, material goods should not be the cause of separation, of selfishness and sin, but of communion and the realisation of each person in the community of the children of God.'

¹⁸⁰ Any interpretation that makes this promise into some sort of guarantee of massive gains for the individual must explain how it is that one could gain hundreds of new siblings if this is not a reference to the church.

¹⁸¹ This is not meant as a denial of private property, and nor was it a church law that property must be given into the communal pot. Acts 5:4 affirms that the individual was still free to dispose of wealth as he saw fit. Rather, it is an attitude of care and generosity that characterised this ideal community; it seems to have been an exercise of the Exodus lesson that those who gather much shouldn't gather too much, and those who gather little shouldn't have too little.

6.4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I hoped at the outset to test whether the re-evaluation of the roles of the Promised Land, recompense theology, and relational dependence upon YHWH could lead to a credible, consistent biblical theology of prosperity that would help to account for the diversity of biblical statements concerning wealth.

For a full biblical theology of wealth, further research is required; however, on the basis of the brief soundings taken in the New Testament, I think that there is a promising degree of explanatory power in this paradigm. There may be passages on prosperity in the Bible that this paradigm is unable to account for; if there are any texts that challenge my conclusions, I have not consciously avoided them.

What we have found suggests that we who are God's church is able to rejoice in our share in the coming fulfilment of Abraham's blessing, in all of its full-orbed physicality and spirituality: we will share in the gracious love of God, enjoying the good things that He has prepared for those whom He has called. And in the interim, we pray for the peace and prosperity of the cities in which we live as exiles while we have the intimate presence of the Holy Spirit, 'who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it' (Ephesians 1:14, ESV).

7. APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX A: VERSE REFERENCES BY WORD & CATEGORY

The following is a list of the verses that appear in the counts tabulated Chapter 1.5.

טוֹב

Unspecified / comprehensive good : Gen. 26:29; Exo. 18:9; Num. 10:29; Num. 10:32; Deu. 10:13; Deu. 26:11; Deu. 30:15; Jos. 23:14; 1Sa. 19:4; 1Sa. 24:19; 1Sa. 25:30; 1Ki. 8:66; Neh. 2:10; Neh. 5:19; Neh. 13:31; Est. 10:3; Job 2:10; Job 7:7; Job 9:25; Job 22:21; Job 30:26; Psa. 4:6; Psa. 34:10; Psa. 34:12; Psa. 73:1; Psa. 84:11; Psa. 85:12; Psa. 103:5; Psa. 104:28; Psa. 106:5; Psa. 107:9; Psa. 119:68; Psa. 122:9; Psa. 125:4; Psa. 145:9; Pro. 3:27; Pro. 12:14; Pro. 13:2; Pro. 13:21; Pro. 16:20; Pro. 17:20; Pro. 19:8; Jer. 5:25; Jer. 8:15; Jer. 14:11; Jer. 14:19; Jer. 15:11; Jer. 17:6; Jer. 18:10; Jer. 21:10; Jer. 24:6; Jer. 29:32; Jer. 32:39;

Jer. 32:41; Jer. 32:42; Jer. 33:9; Jer. 39:16; Jer. 44:27; Lam. 3:17; Lam. 3:25; Lam. 3:38; Eze. 36:11; Amos 9:4; Mic. 1:12 | **Material prosperity**: Deu. 23:6; Deu. 28:11; Deu. 28:12; Deu. 30:9; 1Ki. 10:7; 2Ch. 7:10; Ezra 9:12; Job 21:13; Job 21:25; Job 22:18; Job 36:11; Pro. 31:18; Ecc. 2:1; Ecc. 3:13; Ecc. 4:8; Ecc. 5:11; Ecc. 6:3; Ecc. 6:6; Ecc. 7:14; Jer. 44:17; Zec. 1:17 | **Success**: Ecc. 11:6 | **'Be well with you'**: Deu. 5:33; Deu. 15:16; Deu. 19:13; Psa. 128:2; Jer. 22:15; Jer. 22:16 | **'Good land'**: Exo. 3:8; Num. 13:19; Num. 14:7; Deu. 1:25; Deu. 1:35; Deu. 3:25; Deu. 4:21; Deu. 4:22; Deu. 6:18; Deu. 8:7; Deu. 8:10; Deu. 9:6; Deu. 11:17; Jos. 23:13; Jos. 23:15; Jos. 23:16; Jud. 18:9; 1Ki. 14:15; 1Ch. 28:8 | **'Good hand of God'**: Ezra 7:9; Ezra 8:18; Ezra 8:22; Neh. 2:8; Neh. 2:18

טוֹב

Good of the land: Gen. 45:18; Gen. 45:20; Psa. 65:4; Psa. 119:66; Isa. 1:19; Jer. 2:7 | **Best / good things**: Gen. 24:10; Gen. 45:23; Deu. 6:11; 2Ki. 8:9; Neh. 9:36 | **Goodness of God = material provision**: Exo. 33:19; Neh. 9:25; Neh. 9:35; Psa. 25:7; Psa. 27:13; Psa. 31:19; Psa. 145:7; Isa. 63:7; Jer. 31:12; Jer. 31:14; Hos. 3:5; Zec. 9:17 | **Prosperity**: Ezra 9:12; Job 20:21; Job 21:16; Psa. 128:5; Pro. 11:10

יָטַב

To do well / do good: Gen. 12:16; Gen. 32:9; Gen. 32:12; Exo. 1:20; Num. 10:29; Num. 10:32; Deu. 6:18; Deu. 8:16; Deu. 28:63; Jos. 24:20; 1Sa. 25:31; Job 24:21; Psa. 49:18; Psa. 51:18; Jer. 10:5; Jer. 18:10; Jer. 32:40; Mic. 2:7 | **To go well**: Gen. 12:13; Gen. 40:14; Deu. 4:40; Deu. 5:16; Deu. 5:29; Deu. 6:3; Deu. 12:25; Deu. 12:28; Deu. 22:7; Ruth 3:1; 2Ki. 25:24; Jer. 7:23; Jer. 38:20; Jer. 40:9; Jer. 42:6 | **To make prosperous**: Deu. 30:5; Jud. 17:13; Jud. 17:13; Ruth 3:10; 1Sa. 2:32; 1Ki. 1:47

שָׁלוֹם

Ease, rest, calm: Gen. 15:15; 1Ki. 2:6; 2Ki. 20:19; 2Ki. 22:20; 2Ch. 34:28; Psa. 37:37; Psa. 69:22; Psa. 72:7; Psa. 85:10; Psa. 119:165; Psa. 120:6; Isa. 26:3; Isa. 26:12; Isa. 39:8; Isa. 48:22; Isa. 57:2; Isa. 57:21; Isa. 59:8; Jer. 12:5; Jer. 12:12; Jer. 25:37; Jer. 30:5; Jer. 34:5; Lam. 3:17; Eze. 7:25; Mic. 5:5; Zec. 8:16 | **Safety:** Lev. 26:6; Deu. 29:19; Jos. 10:21; 1Sa. 20:13; 1Sa. 20:21; 2Sa. 17:3; 2Sa. 19:24; 2Sa. 19:30; Jud. 11:31; 1Ki. 22:17; 1Ki. 22:27; 1Ki. 22:28; 2Ch. 18:16; 2Ch. 18:26; 2Ch. 18:27; 2Ch. 19:1; Job 21:9; Psa. 4:8; Psa. 55:18; Isa. 41:3; Jer. 43:12; Zec. 8:10 | **Political peace:** Deu. 20:10; Deu. 20:11; Jos. 9:15; Jud. 11:13; 1Sa. 7:14; 1Ki. 2:5; 1Ki. 20:18; 2Ki. 9:17; 2Ki. 9:18; 2Ki. 9:19; 2Ki. 9:22; 2Ki. 9:31; Psa. 120:7; Psa. 122:6; Psa. 122:7; Pro. 12:20; Ecc. 3:8; Isa. 33:7; Isa. 52:7; Zec. 9:10 | **Wholeness, generic goodness:** Num. 6:26; 1Ki. 2:33; 1Ki. 4:24; 1Ch. 22:9; 2Ch. 15:5; Est. 9:30; Est.

10:3; Job 5:24; Job 25:2; Psa. 29:11; Psa. 34:14; Psa. 35:27; Psa. 122:8; Psa. 125:5; Psa. 128:6; Psa. 147:14; Pro. 3:2; Pro. 3:17; Song 8:10; Isa. 9:6; Isa. 9:7; Isa. 27:5; Isa. 32:17; Isa. 32:18; Isa. 48:18; Isa. 54:13; Isa. 55:12; Isa. 57:19; Isa. 60:17; Isa. 66:12; Jer. 6:14; Jer. 8:11; Jer. 8:15; Jer. 13:19; Jer. 14:13; Jer. 14:19; Jer. 28:9; Jer. 29:7; Jer. 29:11; Eze. 13:10; Eze. 13:16; Mic. 3:5; Nah. 1:15; Hag. 2:9; Zec. 6:13; Mal. 2:5 | **Well-being:** Gen. 29:6; Gen. 37:14; Gen. 43:27; Gen. 43:28; Exo. 18:7; Jud. 18:15; 1Sa. 17:18; 2Sa. 8:10; 2Sa. 11:7; 2Sa. 18:28; 2Sa. 18:29; 2Sa. 18:32; 2Sa. 20:9; 2Ki. 4:23; 2Ki. 4:26; 2Ki. 5:21; 2Ki. 5:22; 2Ki. 9:11; Est. 2:11; Psa. 38:3; Isa. 38:17; Isa. 45:7; Jer. 4:10; Jer. 15:5; Jer. 23:17; Jer. 38:4 | **Relational terms between God and people:** Gen. 41:16; Exo. 18:23; Jud. 6:23; Jud. 6:24; Jud. 18:6; Psa. 85:8; Isa. 53:5; Dan. 10:19; Mal. 2:6 | **Material prosperity:** Deu. 23:6; Ezra 9:12; Job 15:21; Psa. 37:11; Psa. 72:3; Psa. 73:3; Jer. 33:6; Jer. 33:9; Zec. 8:12 | **'Covenant of peace':** Num. 25:12; Isa. 54:10; Eze. 34:25; Eze. 37:26

צֶלַח

Success: Gen. 24:21; Gen. 24:40; Gen. 24:42; Gen. 24:56; Gen. 39:2; Gen. 39:3; Gen. 39:23; Num. 14:41; Deu. 28:29; Jos. 1:8; Jud. 18:5; 1Ki. 22:12; 1Ki. 22:15; 1Ch. 22:11; 1Ch. 22:13; 1Ch. 29:23; 2Ch. 7:11; 2Ch. 13:12; 2Ch. 14:7; 2Ch. 18:11; 2Ch. 18:14; 2Ch. 20:20; 2Ch. 24:20; 2Ch. 26:5; 2Ch. 31:21; 2Ch. 32:30; Neh. 1:11; Neh. 2:20; Psa. 1:3; Psa. 37:7; Psa. 45:4; Psa. 118:25; Pro. 28:13; Isa. 48:15; Isa. 53:10; Isa. 54:17; Isa. 55:11; Jer. 2:37; Jer. 5:28; Jer. 12:1; Jer. 22:30; Jer. 32:5 | **Succeeding in wickedness:** Dan. 8:12; Dan. 8:24; Dan. 8:25; Dan. 11:27; Dan. 11:36 | **Spirit of the Lord 'rushing upon him':** Jud. 14:6; Jud. 14:19; Jud. 15:14; 1Sa. 10:6; 1Sa. 10:10; 1Sa. 11:6; 1Sa. 16:13; 1Sa. 18:10 | **צֶלַח:** Ezra 5:8; Ezra 6:14; Dan. 3:30; Dan. 6:28

שָׁכַל

שָׁכַל: Deu. 29:9; Jos. 1:7; Jos. 1:8; 1Sa. 18:5; 1Sa. 18:14; 1Sa. 18:15; 1Sa. 18:30; 1Ki. 2:3; 2Ki. 18:7; Pro. 17:8; Jer. 10:21; Jer. 20:11 | **שָׁכַל:** Ezra 8:18; Job 17:4; Pro. 3:4; Pro. 12:8; Pro. 13:15; Pro. 16:22; Dan. 8:25

שָׁלַח

שָׁלַח: Job 3:26; Job 12:6; Psa. 122:6; Jer. 12:1; Lam. 1:5 | **שָׁלַח:** Dan. 4:4 | **שָׁלַח:** Psa. 30:6 | **שָׁלַח:** 1Ch. 4:40; Job 16:12; Job 20:20; Job 21:23; Psa. 73:12; Jer. 49:31; Eze. 23:42; Zec. 7:7 | **שָׁלַח:** Psa. 122:7; Pro. 17:1; Jer. 22:21; Eze. 16:49; Dan. 8:25 | **שָׁלַח:** Dan. 4:27

כֹּשֶׁר

Ecc. 10:10; Ecc. 11:6

צִמָּח

2Sa. 23:5; Eze. 16:7

הִשָּׁג

Lev. 25:26; Lev. 25:47; Lev. 25:49; Lev. 26:5; Deu. 28:2; Deu. 28:15; Deu. 28:45; Isa. 35:10; Isa. 51:11

7.2 APPENDIX B: CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER DISTRIBUTION

This is the full table listing occurrences per chapter. The results are as follows:

	בְּרָכָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	טָב	שְׁלוֹם	צֶלַח	Other	TOTAL
Gen. 1	22,28							2
Gen. 2	3							1
Gen. 5	2							1
Gen. 9	1, 26							2
Gen. 12	2, 3	2		13, 16				5
Gen. 14	19, 20							2
Gen. 15					15			1
Gen. 17	16, 20							2
Gen. 18	18							1
Gen. 22	17, 18							2
Gen. 24	1, 11, 27, 31, 35, 48, 60		10			21, 40, 42, 56		12
Gen. 25	11							1
Gen. 26	3, 4, 12, 24, 29	29						6
Gen. 27	4, 7, 10, 19, 23, 25, 27, 30, 31, 33, 34, 38, 41	12, 35, 36, 38, 41					12, 35, 36, 38, 41	23
Gen. 28	1, 3, 6, 14	4					4	6
Gen. 29					6			1
Gen. 30	27, 30							2
Gen. 31	55							1
Gen. 32	26, 29			9, 12				4
Gen. 33		11					11	2
Gen. 35	9							1
Gen. 37					14			1
Gen. 39	5	5				2, 3, 23	5	6
Gen. 40				14				1
Gen. 41					16			1
Gen. 43					27, 28			2
Gen. 45			18, 20, 23					3
Gen. 47	7, 10							2
Gen. 48	3, 9, 15, 16, 20							5
Gen. 49	25, 28	25, 26, 28					25, 26, 28	8
Exo. 1				20				1
Exo. 3		8						1
Exo. 12	32							1
Exo. 18	10	9			7, 23			4
Exo. 20	11, 24							2
Exo. 23	25							1
Exo. 32		29						1
Exo. 33			19					1
Exo. 39	43							1
Lev. 9	22, 23							2
Lev. 25		21					26, 47, 49	4
Lev. 26					6		5	2
Num. 6	23, 24, 27				26			4
Num. 10		29, 32		29, 32				4
Num. 13		19						1
Num. 14		7				41		2
Num. 22	6, 12							2
Num. 23	11, 20, 25							3
Num. 24	1, 9, 10							3
Num. 25					12			1

	בְּרָךְ	בְּרָכָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	יָטִב	שְׁלֹמִים	צֶלַח	Other	TOTAL
Deu. 1	11		25, 35						3
Deu. 2	7								1
Deu. 3			25						1
Deu. 4			21, 22		40				3
Deu. 5			33		16, 29				3
Deu. 6			18	11	3, 18				4
Deu. 7	13, 14								2
Deu. 8	10		7, 10		16				4
Deu. 9			6						1
Deu. 10	8		13						2
Deu. 11		26, 27, 29	17						4
Deu. 12	7	15			25, 28				4
Deu. 14	24, 29								2
Deu. 15	4, 6, 10, 14, 18		16						6
Deu. 16	10, 15	17							3
Deu. 19			13						1
Deu. 20						10, 11			2
Deu. 21	5								1
Deu. 22					7				1
Deu. 23	20	5	6			6			4
Deu. 24	13, 19								2
Deu. 26	15		11						2
Deu. 27	12								1
Deu. 28	3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12	2, 8	11, 12		63		29	2 (15, 45)	13
Deu. 29	19					19		9	3
Deu. 30	16	1, 19	9, 15		5				6
Deu. 33	1, 11, 13, 20, 24	1, 23							7
Jos. 1							8	7, 8	3
Jos. 8	33	34							2
Jos. 9						15			1
Jos. 10						21			1
Jos. 14	13								1
Jos. 15		19							1
Jos. 17	14								1
Jos. 22	6, 7, 33								3
Jos. 23			13, 14, 15, 16						4
Jos. 24	10				20				2
Jud. 1		15							1
Jud. 5	2, 8, 24								3
Jud. 6						23, 24			2
Jud. 11						13, 31			2
Jud. 13	24								1
Jud. 14							6, 19		2
Jud. 15							14		1
Jud. 17	2				13, 13				3
Jud. 18			9			6, 15	5		4
1Sa. 2	20				32				2
1Sa. 7						14			1
1Sa. 9	13								1
1Sa. 10							6, 10		2
1Sa. 11							6		1
1Sa. 13	10								1
1Sa. 15	13								1
1Sa. 16							13		1
1Sa. 17						18			1
1Sa. 18							10	5, 14, 15, 30	5
1Sa. 19			4						1
1Sa. 20						13, 21			2
1Sa. 23	21								1
1Sa. 24			19						1
1Sa. 25	14, 32, 33, 39	27	30		31				7
1Sa. 26	25								1
1Sa. 30		26							1

	בְּרָכָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	יָטִב	שְׁלֹמֹם	צִלָּה	Other	TOTAL
2Sa. 2	5							1
2Sa. 6	1, 12, 18, 20							4
2Sa. 7	29	29						2
2Sa. 8	10				10			2
2Sa. 11					7			1
2Sa. 13	25							1
2Sa. 14	22							1
2Sa. 17					3			1
2Sa. 18	28				28, 28, 32			4
2Sa. 19	39				24, 30			3
2Sa. 20					9			1
2Sa. 21	3							1
2Sa. 22	47							1
2Sa. 23							5	1
1Ki. 1	47, 48			47				3
1Ki. 2	45				5, 6, 33		3	5
1Ki. 4					24			1
1Ki. 5	7							1
1Ki. 8	14, 15, 55, 56, 66	66						6
1Ki. 10	9	7						2
1Ki. 14		15						1
1Ki. 20					18			1
1Ki. 21	10, 13							2
1Ki. 22					17, 27, 28	12, 15		5
2Ki. 4	29				23, 26			3
2Ki. 5		15			21, 22			3
2Ki. 8			9					1
2Ki. 9					11, 17, 18, 19, 22, 31			6
2Ki. 10	15							1
2Ki. 18		31					7	2
2Ki. 20					19			1
2Ki. 22					20			1
2Ki. 25				24				1
Isa. 1			19					1
Isa. 9					6, 7			2
Isa. 19	25	24						2
Isa. 26					3, 12			2
Isa. 27					5			1
Isa. 32					17, 18			2
Isa. 33					7			1
Isa. 35							10	1
Isa. 36		16						1
Isa. 38					17			1
Isa. 39					8			1
Isa. 41					3			1
Isa. 44		3						1
Isa. 45					7			1
Isa. 48					18, 22	15		3
Isa. 51	2						11	2
Isa. 52					7			1
Isa. 53					5	10		2
Isa. 54					10, 13	17		3
Isa. 55					12	11		2
Isa. 57					2, 19, 21			3
Isa. 59					8			1
Isa. 60					17			1
Isa. 61	9							1
Isa. 63			7					1
Isa. 65	16, 23	8						3
Isa. 66	3				12			2

	בִּרְךָ	בִּרְכָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	יָטֵב	שְׁלֹום	צֶלַח	Other	TOTAL
Jer. 2				7			37		2
Jer. 4	2					10			2
Jer. 5			25				28		2
Jer. 6						14			1
Jer. 7					23				1
Jer. 8			15			11, 15			3
Jer. 10					5			21	2
Jer. 12						5, 12	1	1	4
Jer. 13						19			1
Jer. 14			11, 19			13, 19			4
Jer. 15			11			5			2
Jer. 17	7		6						2
Jer. 18			10		10				2
Jer. 20	14							11	2
Jer. 21			10						1
Jer. 22			15, 16				30	21	4
Jer. 23						17			1
Jer. 24			6						1
Jer. 25						37			1
Jer. 28						9			1
Jer. 29			32			7,11			3
Jer. 30						5			1
Jer. 31	23			12, 14					3
Jer. 32			39, 41, 42		40		5		5
Jer. 33			9			6, 9			3
Jer. 34						5			1
Jer. 38					20	4			2
Jer. 39			16						1
Jer. 40					9				1
Jer. 42					6				1
Jer. 43						12			1
Jer. 44			17, 27						2
Jer. 49								31	1
Eze. 3	3								1
Eze. 7						7			1
Eze. 13						10, 16			2
Eze. 16								49	1
Eze. 23								42	1
Eze. 34		26				25			2
Eze. 36			11						1
Eze. 37						26			1
Eze. 44		30							1
The 12	Hag. 2:19 Zec. 11:5	Joe. 2:14 Zec. 8:13 Mal. 2:2 Mal. 3:10	Amo. 9:4 Mic. 1:12 Zec. 1:17	Hos. 3:5 Zec. 9:17	Micah 2:7	Micah 3:5 Micah 5:5 Nahum 1:15 Haggai 2:9 Zec. 6:13 Zec. 8:10, 12, 16 Zec. 9:10 Mal. 2:5 Mal. 2:6		Zec. 7:7	Mal. 2 x3 Zec. 8 x4

	בְּרָכָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	יָטִב	שְׁלֹמֹם	צִלָּה	Other	TOTAL
Psa. 1						3		1
Psa. 3	8							1
Psa. 4		6			8			2
Psa. 5	12							1
Psa. 10	3							1
Psa. 16	7							1
Psa. 18	46							1
Psa. 21	3, 6							2
Psa. 24	5							1
Psa. 25			7					1
Psa. 26	12							1
Psa. 27			13					1
Psa. 28	6, 9							2
Psa. 29	11				11			2
Psa. 30							6	1
Psa. 31	21		19					2
Psa. 34	1	10, 12			14			4
Psa. 35					27			1
Psa. 37	22	26			11, 37	7		5
Psa. 38					3			1
Psa. 41	13							1
Psa. 45	2					4		2
Psa. 49	18			18				2
Psa. 51				18				1
Psa. 55					18			1
Psa. 62	4							1
Psa. 63	4							1
Psa. 65	10		4					2
Psa. 66	8, 20							2
Psa. 67	1, 6, 7							3
Psa. 68	19, 26, 35							3
Psa. 69					22			1
Psa. 72	15, 17, 18, 19				3, 7			6
Psa. 73		1			3		12	3
Psa. 84	6	11						2
Psa. 85		12			8, 10			3
Psa. 89	52							1
Psa. 95	6							1
Psa. 96	2							1
Psa. 100	4							1
Psa. 103	1, 2, 20, 21, 22	5						6
Psa. 104	1, 35	28						3
Psa. 106	48	5						2
Psa. 107	38	9						2
Psa. 109	28	17						2
Psa. 112	2							1
Psa. 113	2							1
Psa. 115	12, 13, 15, 18							4
Psa. 118	26					25		2
Psa. 119	12	68			165			3
Psa. 120					6, 7			2
Psa. 122		9			6, 7, 8		6, 7	6
Psa. 124	6							1
Psa. 125		4			5			2
Psa. 128	4, 5	2	5		6			5
Psa. 129	8	8						2
Psa. 132	15							1
Psa. 133		3						1
Psa. 134	1, 2, 3							3
Psa. 135	19, 20, 21							3
Psa. 144	1							1
Psa. 145	1, 2, 10, 21	9	7					6
Psa. 147	13				14			2

	בִּרְדָּה	בִּרְכָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	יָטֵב	שְׁלֹמֹם	עֲלָה	Other	TOTAL
Pro. 3	33		27			2, 17		4	5
Pro. 5	18								1
Pro. 10		6, 7, 22							3
Pro. 11		11, 25, 26		10					4
Pro. 12			14			20		8	3
Pro. 13			2, 21					15	3
Pro. 16			20					22	2
Pro. 17			20					1, 8	3
Pro. 19			8						1
Pro. 20	21								1
Pro. 22	9								1
Pro. 24		25							1
Pro. 27	14								1
Pro. 28		20					13		2
Pro. 30	11								1
Pro. 31			18						1
Job 1	5, 10, 11, 21								4
Job 2	5, 9		10						3
Job 3								26	1
Job 5						24			1
Job 7			7						1
Job 9			25						1
Job 12								6	1
Job 15						21			1
Job 16								12	1
Job 17								4	1
Job 20				21				20	2
Job 21			13, 25	16		9		23	5
Job 22			18, 21						2
Job 24					21				1
Job 25						2			1
Job 29		13							1
Job 30			26						1
Job 31	20								1
Job 36			11						1
Job 42	12								1
Song						10			1
Ruth 2	4, 19, 20								3
Ruth 3	10				1, 10				3
Ruth 4	14								1
Ecc. 2			1						1
Ecc. 3			13			8			2
Ecc. 4			8						1
Ecc. 5			11						1
Ecc. 6			3, 6						2
Ecc. 7			14						1
Ecc. 10								10	1
Ecc. 11			6					6	2
Lam. 1								5	1
Lam. 3			17, 25, 38			17			4
Est. 2						11			1
Est. 9						30			1
Est. 10			3			3			2
Dan. 3							30		1
Dan. 4								4, 27	2
Dan. 6							28		1
Dan. 8							12, 24, 25	25, 25	5
Dan. 10						19			1
Dan. 11							27, 36		2

	בְּרָכָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	יָטִב	שְׁלוֹם	עֲלָה	Other	TOTAL
Ezra 5						8		1
Ezra 6						14		1
Ezra 7	27	9						2
Ezra 8		18, 22					18	3
Ezra 9		12	12		12			3
Neh. 1						11		1
Neh. 2		8, 10, 18				20		4
Neh. 5		19						1
Neh. 8	6							1
Neh. 9	5	5	25, 35, 36					5
Neh. 11	2							1
Neh. 13		2	31					2
1Ch. 4	10						40	2
1Ch. 13	14							1
1Ch. 16	2, 36, 43							3
1Ch. 17	27							1
1Ch. 18	10							1
1Ch. 22					9	11, 13		3
1Ch. 23	13							1
1Ch. 26	5							1
1Ch. 28		8						1
1Ch. 29	10, 20					23		3
2Ch. 2	12							1
2Ch. 6	3, 4, 13							3
2Ch. 7		10				11		2
2Ch. 9	8							1
2Ch. 13						12		1
2Ch. 14						7		1
2Ch. 15					5			1
2Ch. 18					16, 26, 27	11,14		5
2Ch. 19					1			1
2Ch. 20	26					20		2
2Ch. 24						20		1
2Ch. 26						5		1
2Ch. 30	27							1
2Ch. 31	8, 10					21		3
2Ch. 32						30		1
2Ch. 34					28			1

7.3 APPENDIX C: GENESIS 12 GRAMMATICAL DIAGRAM

1 And YHWH said to Abram,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם

'Go by yourself
from your land
and your relatives
and from the house of your father
to the land that I will show you.

לְךָ-לְךָ *
מֵאֶרְצְךָ
וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה:

2 And I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you,
and I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גִּדּוֹל

וְאֶבְרַכְךָ

וְאֶגְדַּלְתִּי שְׁמֶךָ

וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:

3 I will bless those who bless you
and he who dishonours you I will curse,
and will find blessing
in you
all the families of the earth.

וְאֶבְרַכְתִּי מְבָרְכֶיךָ

וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאֵר

וְנִבְרַכְכוּ

בְּךָ

כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה: +

4 And Abram went
as YHWH had spoken to him
and Lot went with him.

וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם

כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה ↑

וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט

Now Abram was seventy-five years old
when he left Haran.

וְאַבְרָם בֶּן-חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה

בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן:

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ

וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife,
and Lot the son of his brother,
and all his property that he had accumulated,
and the persons that he had acquired in Haran.

וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ

וְאֶת-הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן

And they departed in order to go to the land of Canaan,
and they arrived in the land of Canaan.

וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן:

6 And Abram passed through the land
until the (sacred) site of Shechem
until the terebinth of Moreh;
at that time the Canaanites were in the land.

וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ
עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֵם
עַד אֵלֹן מוֹרֶה
וְהַכְנַעֲנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ:]

7 And YHWH appeared to Abram and he said,

וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר

‘To your seed I will give this land.’

לְזֶרְעֶךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת **

And he built there an altar to YHWH –
the one who appeared to him.

וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה
הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו:

8 And he moved on from there to the hill country
on the east of Bethel,
and pitched his tent
with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.
He built there an altar to YHWH,
and he called on the name of YHWH.

וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הַהִרָה
מִקְדָּם לְבֵית-אֵל
וַיִּשָּׁט אֶת־הָאֵל
בֵּית-אֵל מִיָּמִין וְהָעִי מִקְדָּם
וַיִּבֶן-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה
וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

9 And Abram journeyed on
journeying to the Negev.

וַיִּסַּע אַבְרָם
הַלּוֹךְ וְנִסְוֶה תְּנִיבָה: פ

10 Now there arose a famine in the land
and so Abram went down to Egypt in order to sojourn there
because the famine in the land was severe.

וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ
וַיֵּרָד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִמָּה לְגֹר שָׁם
כִּי-כָבֵד הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ:

11 And it happened as he drew near to enter Egypt,
he said to Sarai his wife,

וַיְהִי כַאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לְבֹא מִצְרַיִמָּה
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ

‘Look, please, I know that you are a woman
of beautiful appearance

* הִנֵּה-נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִשָּׁה יְפֹת-מֵרָאָה אַתָּה:

12 and when the Egyptians see you,
they will say,

וְהָיָה כִּי-יִרְאוּ אֹתְךָ הַמִּצְרַיִם
וַאֲמָרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת

“This is his wife,”

and they will kill me and let you live.

+ וְהָרַגוּ אֹתִי וְאֹתְךָ יַחְיֶי:

13 Please say you are my sister
in order that it might go well with me
for your sake
and my soul shall live
on account of you.'

* אִמְרִי-נָא אֶחָתִי אֵת
לְמַעַן יִיטַב-לִי
בְּעַבְדֶּךָ ↑
וְחַיְתִּי וְנַפְשִׁי
בְּנִלְלָךְ: ↑ +

14 And when Abram entered Egypt,
the Egyptians noticed the woman,
because she was very beautiful.

וַיְהִי כִּבּוּא אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִם
וַיֵּרְאוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה
כִּי-יֹפִיָּהּ הוּא מְאֹד: ↑

15 And the princes of Pharaoh saw her
and they praised her to Pharaoh;
and the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh.

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שָׂרֵי פַרְעֹה
וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה
וַתֵּקַח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פַּרְעֹה:

16 But with Abram it went well for her sake;
and to him came sheep and cattle,
and donkeys and manservants and maidservants and
female donkeys and camels.

וּלְאַבְרָם הֵיטִיב בְּעַבְדוּהָ
וַיְהִי-לּוֹ צֹאן-וּבָקָר
וְחֲמֹרִים וְעֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחֹת וְאִתְּנָת וְנִמְלִים:

17 But YHWH touched Pharaoh with great plagues,
and his house,
for the matter of Sarai, Abram's wife.

וַיִּנָּגַע יְהוָה אֶת-פַּרְעֹה בְּגָדִים
וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ ↑
עַל-דִּבְרֵי שָׂרֵי אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם:
וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר ↑

18 And Pharaoh called for Abraham and said,

'What have you done to me?
Why did you not tell me that she is your wife?'
19 'Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?
And I took her to me to be a wife,
and now look! Your wife!
Take and go!'

* מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי
לָמָּה לֹא-הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הוּא:
לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֶחָתִי הוּא
וָאָקַח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה
וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ
קַח וְלֵךְ: +

20 And Pharaoh commanded men
and they escorted him and his wife and all his
possessions away.

וַיִּצְוּ עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אַנְשִׁים
וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לּוֹ:

7.4 APPENDIX D: DEUTERONOMY 6 GRAMMATICAL DIAGRAM

1 And this is the command(ment),
the prescriptions and the judgements
that YHWH your God commanded
to teach you to do in the land
that you are crossing over there to possess.

וְזֹאת | הַמִּצְוָה
| הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים
↑
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
↑
לְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ
↑
אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים ¹⁸² שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

2 In order that you fear YHWH your God
to keep all his prescriptions and his commandments
that I am commanding you
you and your son and your son's son
all days of your life
and in order that your days may be lengthened.

לְמַעַן תִּירָא אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
↑
לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת־כָּל־חֻקֹּתָיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו
↑
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה ¹⁸³
↑
אֹתְךָ וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ בְּנֶךָ
↑
כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ
↑
וּלְמַעַן יֵאָרְכּוּ ¹⁸⁴ יְמֵיךָ:

3 And hear, O Israel,
and be watchful to do
that it shall go well with you
and that you shall greatly increase
as YHWH God of your fathers promised to you
(it is) a land flowing with milk and honey.

וְשָׁמַעְתָּ ¹⁸⁵ יִשְׂרָאֵל
↑
וְשָׁמַרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת ¹⁸⁶
↑
אֲשֶׁר ¹⁸⁷ יִטַּב לְךָ
↑
וְאֲשֶׁר תַּרְבּוֹן מֵאֵד
↑
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ לְךָ
↑
אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ: פ

4 Hear, O Israel, YHWH our God YHWH (is) one.

שָׁמַע ¹⁸⁸ יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

5 Love YHWH your God
with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your strength.

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
↑
בְּכָל־לִבְּךָ
↑
וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ
↑
וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ:

¹⁸² Qal act participle mp עבר 'to pass over'

¹⁸³ Piel Participle ms + pl suffix

¹⁸⁴ arak – Hiph impf 3mp – draw out, lengthen (defective form (qibbutz rather than sureq) +paragogic nun)

¹⁸⁵ This is a weqatal that is usually translated as an imperative, though it ought to be following an earlier imperative.

¹⁸⁶ Qal inf. constr. 'make, do'

¹⁸⁷ 'Resolvable into "so that"' says Brown Driver Briggs

¹⁸⁸ The primary imperative that drives the following weqatals.

6 And let these words
that I am commanding you today
be upon your heart

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה [...] עַל-לִבְּךָ:
[אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ¹⁸⁹ הַיּוֹם]

7 Teach (pl) *them* diligently/incisively to your (sg) sons
and speak (sg) of them
when you sit in your house
and when you go on the way
and when you lie down
and when you rise up.

וְשִׁנְנָתָם¹⁹⁰ לְבָנֶיךָ
וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם
בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ¹⁹¹ בְּבֵיתְךָ
וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ
וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ
וּבְקוּמְךָ:

8 Bind *them* as a sign upon your hand
and let them be as frontlets between your eyes.
9 And write them upon doorposts of your house
and on your gates.

וּקְשַׁרְתָּם¹⁹² לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ
וְהָיוּ לְטַפָּחַת¹⁹³ בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ:
וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזוֹת¹⁹⁴ בֵּיתְךָ
וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ: ס

10 And when it happens
that YHWH your God brings you into the land

וְהָיָה כִּי יביאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע¹⁹⁵ לָאֲבוֹתֶיךָ לֵאמֹר
לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב

that he swore to your fathers Abram, Isaac and Jacob
to give to you –
cities great and good
that you did not build,
11 houses full of all good (things) that you did not fill,
and wells having been dug that you did not dig,
vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant –
and you eat and are satisfied,

עָרִים גְּדוֹלוֹת וְטוֹבוֹת
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-בָנִיתָ:
וּבָתִּים מְלֵאִים כָּל-טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא-מְלֵאתָ
וּבָרִת חֲצוּבִים¹⁹⁶ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-חָצַבְתָּ
כְּרָמִים וְזֵיתִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-נִטַּעְתָּ¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁹ Piel Ptc. MS + Pnn Sx 2S 'to command'

¹⁹⁰ Piel 2MP – שָׁנַן 'to sharpen' (Piel 'to sharpen / teach incisively')

¹⁹¹ ב prefix + Qal inf. const. יָשַׁב 'to sit' + Pnn Sx 2MS.

¹⁹² Weqatal from קָשַׁר 'to bind; league together'

¹⁹³ From תַּפְּחָת 'bands, frontlets'

¹⁹⁴ From מְזוּזָה 'doorpost'

¹⁹⁵ Prefix ל + Qal inf const. of נָתַן

¹⁹⁶ From חָצַב 'to dig'

¹⁹⁷ From נָטַע 'to fasten, plant'

12 watch yourself
lest you forget YHWH
who brought you out
from the land of Egypt
from the house of slaves.

וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ:
הַשְׁמֵר לְךָ¹⁹⁸
פֶּן־תִּשְׁכַּח¹⁹⁹ אֶת־יְהוָה
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאָךְ²⁰⁰
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

13 It is YHWH your God that you shall fear
and him you shall serve
and in his name shall you swear.

אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא
וְאֵתוֹ תַעֲבֹד
וּבשְׁמוֹ תִשָּׁבַע:

14 You shall not go after other gods
from the gods of the nations
that surround you;

לֹא תִלְכּוּן²⁰¹ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
מֵאֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים
אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבוֹתֶיכֶם:

15 for YHWH your God is a jealous God in your midst,
lest it kindles the wrath of YHWH your God against you
and he destroys you from upon the face of the land.

כִּי אֵל קַנָּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּקִרְבְּךָ²⁰²
פֶּן־יִחַרְה²⁰³ אֶף־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּךְ
וְהִשְׁמִידֶךָ²⁰⁴ מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: ס

16 You shall not test YHWH your God
as you tested (Him) in Massah.

לֹא תִנָּסֶה²⁰⁵ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיכֶם
כַּאֲשֶׁר נִסִּיתָם בַּמֶּסָּה: ↑

¹⁹⁸ Niph Impv 2MS שָׁמַר 'Qal: keep, watch; Niphal: be on your guard'

¹⁹⁹ Yiqtol 3fs/2ms שָׁכַח 'to forget'

²⁰⁰ Hiphil 3ms הוֹצֵא 'to go out' + suffix 2ms

²⁰¹ Yiqtol 2mp הִלַּךְ 'to walk, go' + paragogic nun

²⁰² Preposition + קִרְבֵּי 'middle, midst' + suffix 2ms

²⁰³ Yiqtol 3ms חָרָה 'to warm, kindle'

²⁰⁴ Hiphil 3ms שָׁמַד 'to destroy' + suffix 2ms

²⁰⁵ Piel Impf 2mp נִסָּה 'to test'

17 You shall certainly keep the commandments
of YHWH your God
and his testimonies and prescriptions
that he commanded you.

שְׁמוֹר²⁰⁶ תִּשְׁמְרוּן | אֶת־מִצְוֹת
↑ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וְעֲדָתוֹ וְחֻקָּיו
↑ אֲשֶׁר צֻוֶּה:

18 You shall do the straight and the good
in the eyes of YHWH
so that it may go well with you
and you may go and take possession of the good land
that YHWH swore to your fathers;
19 to cast out all your enemies from before you
as YHWH promised.

וְעָשִׂיתָ יִשְׁרָאֵל וְטוֹב
בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
לְמַעַן²⁰⁷ יֵיטֵב לָךְ
↑ וּבָאתָ וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה
אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתָּיִם:
↑ לְהַרְדֶּךָ²⁰⁸ אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבֶיךָ²⁰⁹ מִפְּנֶיךָ
כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: ס

20 Because your son shall ask in time to come saying,

כִּי־יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר²¹⁰ לֵאמֹר

Why/what the testimonies and prescriptions and judgements
that YHWH our God commanded you?

* מַה הָעֲדוֹת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים
+ אֲשֶׁר צֻוֶּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲתָכֶם:

21 And you shall say to your son,

וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבְנֶךָ

We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt
and YHWH brought us out from Egypt
with a mighty hand;

* עֲבָדִים הָייְנוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם
וַיּוֹצִיאֵנוּ²¹¹ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם
↑ בְּיָד חֲזָקָה:

²⁰⁶ Inf abs from שְׁמוֹר

²⁰⁷ Purpose or result?

²⁰⁸ From הָרַם 'cast out, expel, thrust away'

²⁰⁹ From אֹיֵב 'enemy'

²¹⁰ 'time to come, tomorrow'

²¹¹ Hiphil impf. 3ms יָצָא 'to bring out' + suffix 1p

22 And YHWH gave signs and wonders great and grave
upon Egypt and Pharaoh and all his house
before our eyes;

וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים²¹² גְּדֹלִים וְרָעִים
בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ
לְעֵינֵינוּ:

23 And we were brought out from there
In order to bring us in, to give to us the land
that he swore to our fathers.

וַאֲנִחנוּ הוּצֵאנוּ מִשָּׁם²¹³
לְמַעַן הַבִּיא²¹⁴ אֶתְנוּ לְתֶת²¹⁵ לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ:

24 And YHWH commanded us to do all these prescriptions,
(in order) to fear YHWH our God
for good to us all the days
to keep us alive as this day.

וַיִּצְוֵנוּ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת²¹⁶ אֶת־כָּל־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה
לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
לְטוֹב לָנוּ כָּל־הַיָּמִים ↑
לְחַיֵּתָנוּ כַּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: ↑

25 And righteousness will be to us
if we are careful to keep all of this commandment
before (the face of) YHWH our God
as he commanded us.

וַיְצַדֵּקָה תְּהִיָּה־לָנוּ
כִּי־נִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ ↑
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּנוּ²¹⁷: ס

+

²¹² From מוֹפֵת 'wonder, miracle'

²¹³ Hophal pf 3ms / inf const. יִצֵּא

²¹⁴ Hiphil inf cs. בִּיא

²¹⁵ Preposition ל + inf. cs. of נָתַן

²¹⁶ Preposition ל + Qal inf. cs. עָשָׂה

²¹⁷ Piel 3ms צִוָּה + suffix 3p

7.5 APPENDIX E: DATE OF DEUTERONOMY

As an evangelical, I am committed to the belief that scripture is of divine origin and constitutes divine speech. Therefore, I am slow to accept arguments that throw this into doubt, unless the argument is incontrovertible. That being said, I have attempted to weigh the arguments for and against a late date for Deuteronomy with an open mind. What follows is my assessment of the arguments, and the reasons why I retain confidence in the biblical testimony that Deuteronomy is Mosaic in character and (at least some) content.

7.5.1 Deuteronomy shows a history of development

Although Deuteronomy has Moses as speaker, there are clear statements, especially in chapter 34, that identify the work of a later hand than that of Moses or Joshua. Besides the obvious account of Moses' death and burial in verse 7, the writer claims that no one knows where he is buried 'to this day', which suggests the passing of some time. Furthermore, the witness in verse 10 that no prophet like Moses had arisen in Israel since then only makes sense if there has been a period of waiting, and presumably the experience of prophets *not* like Moses. From this alone we can infer that Deuteronomy was not solely the work of Moses.

Stylistic similarity across narrative books suggests redaction

Secondly, the corpus of literature from Deuteronomy to Kings shares a unified set of stylistic and theological concerns, and each book consciously resumes the storyline of its predecessor in the canon. It seems likely that an editorial hand has attempted to unify Israel's national history into a single coherent story. It seems reasonable on this evidence to suggest that while there may have been earlier iterations, there certainly must have been significant work done on these texts around the time of the exile (seeing as that is where Kings leaves off).

According to Wenham (1985:15ff), some scholars consider the unity of style of these historical narratives, and the resemblance to later books such as Jeremiah, to indicate that the texts belong to a common era. However, he provides a counter to that view, arguing that the style of foundational texts tends to be preserved long after language has changed. Their influence causes later authors to

mimic their style.²¹⁸ So resemblance in style need not indicate that texts are contemporaries; it may merely indicate conscious referencing of a respected text.

Wenham (1985:18f) also claims that earlier prophecies such as Hosea and Amos share similarities with Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, and that these similarities cannot be accounted for by postulating a Deuteronomistic revision of the books. In his reckoning, Hosea and Amos have dependence upon Deuteronomy that goes far deeper than style. Excising its influence is destructive of the core meaning, not merely superficial details that might have been added later. This suggests that Deuteronomy predates those books.

Stylistic discontinuity internally suggests complicated development

Gerhard von Rad considers the style of the book to be choppy, which – if correct – suggests that more than one hand has been involved in the composition. He says,

‘The account is extraordinarily discontinuous. At frequent intervals the reader comes across interruptions and gaps in the sense. When we consider the form too, we find the style of the speaker changing continually. We must conclude from all this that Deuteronomy... must have had an unusually complicated previous history.’ (1966:12f)

On the other hand, judgements about style can be overdone. What seems discontinuous to one may seem carefully calculated to another. For example, Christensen (2001:lxix) has conducted a study of the book as literature constructed for public performance. He notes that it displays tightly structured concentric patterns even at different levels of analysis (i.e. major sections of the book seem to be concentric in structure, but even their component parts are structured concentrically too). He argues convincingly that the puzzling shifts between singular and plural are actually a performance device that signals structural changes, rather than providing evidence of changes in the speaker’s style or conflation of sources. The apparent choppiness of the text at certain points may have more to do with the poetic or rhythmic concerns of its composition.

Christensen is not opposed to the idea that the book may have undergone revisions of its structure or updates of terminology as it was used in worship, but he is confident that it had generations of use in worship before the time of Josiah (2001:lxixvi). More to the point, rather than viewing the text as discontinuous, he likens Deuteronomy to a symphony. Symphonies tend not to be arrived at

²¹⁸ Our own King James Version of the Bible demonstrates this, even in our much more adaptive times. Even fairly recent translations preserved the ‘thees and thous’ at least for God’s direct speech, and many key verses retain the KJV structure or vocabulary to this day, even though they are archaic.

by incremental changes over time; they require the oversight of a mind of genius who can craft whatever source material exists into a unified masterwork. This is the sort of process that he envisages to explain the composition of Deuteronomy in its final form, whether that composer was Moses or someone else (2001:lxvii).

In short, judgements about style are somewhat subjective, and even the charge that the text is discontinuous can be strongly contested.

7.5.2 Elements in the text best fit the 8th or 7th Century

The content of some passages in the book seems to fit later centuries, particularly the Assyrian era. Tigay (1996:xx) claims that scholars since De Wette in 1805 and Wellhausen later in the century have noted that the content of certain laws seems to fit the context of the 7th or 8th Century, rather than earlier periods in Israel's history. For example, there is no evidence of the worship of heavenly bodies in Israel before that date, and no specific prohibitions of it in the rest of the Pentateuch. It is thought that the specific mention in Deuteronomy was occasioned by the emergence of the practice shortly before the exile. While there might be any number of reasons for this specific mention, Weinfeld strengthens the argument by pointing out that Deuteronomy also reproduces a series of curses in 28:23-35 that must come from Assyrian sources. He says,

the order [of the curses] follows the hierarchy of the gods Sin and Shamash, who are each associated with a particular curse... the order of the same curses in Deuteronomy cannot be explained. (1991:7)

It seems clear that at least parts of Deuteronomy owe their origin to the Neo-Assyrian period.

On the other hand, Tigay (1996:xxi-xxii) points out that there are a number of problems with ascribing a uniformly late date to the contents of Deuteronomy. For example, Josiah's reforms in Kings do not correspond perfectly with Deuteronomy, which one would expect if the book had been written to give legitimacy to his actions. He adds that Hezekiah also engaged in reforms a century earlier, and while not explicitly based on a book, it demonstrates for him that the 'ideas that produced the book were clearly developing'. It may also indicate that a form of the book already existed. Tigay regards the influence of the Assyrian Empire upon the book to be strong, but also concedes that there is much in the book that fits a period considerably earlier than this. The society reflected in the laws is agricultural and does not acknowledge later professional and merchant classes; he considers it to reflect the era of the judges. McConville concurs, saying,

'Deuteronomy generally legislated for conditions which characterised a considerably earlier period than Josiah' (quoted in Waltke, 2001:27).

Thus, even if some details promote the idea of a late Deuteronomy, it must be recognised that the evidence often points in the opposite direction.

Furthermore, the evidence that places certain texts in the Neo-Assyrian period is often weak. For example, vocabulary counts are taken as evidence of theological trends, as in the above-mentioned example of the worship of heavenly bodies being specifically prohibited only in Deuteronomy (and therefore the assumption that it was not a concern in earlier eras). McConville (2002:32) takes issue with this approach in so far as it is done without regard to context.

For example, it is claimed that Deuteronomy presupposes a more advanced world, seen for example in an emphasis upon Israel as city-dweller, and the near-absence of the word 'clan', which is frequent in Numbers and Joshua.

Again this demonstrates the degree to which evidence is open to various interpretations, and indeed that evidence is often skewed to suit ideology, rather than providing the foundations of it. McConville (2002:32) points out that the emphasis upon 'clan' in Numbers is actually restricted to a few specialised texts, and Deuteronomy has 'theological reasons for depicting people as a unity'. The claim that the interest in cities has to do with a later mode of living is also incorrect, because in Deuteronomy the language is predominantly related to 'the concept of a subdued land ("cities you did not build") and the expansion of its borders' rather than new mode of life. In short, vocabulary counts cannot be given interpretive force when context and theology have been ignored.

Josiah's central cult

A final example of evidence in Deuteronomy that is supposed to support connections with the 7th Century is the strong apology for centralised worship, which was a concern of Josiah's but is less pressing earlier in Israel's history (Wenham, 1985:15ff).

Wenham responds to this by pointing out that Deuteronomy does not actually support centralisation of the cult *in Jerusalem*, because although it declares that centralisation should take place in 'the place the Lord will choose', Moses commands worship to take place on Mt Ebal near Shechem, a forbidden 'high place' by Josiah's definition. McConville (2002:35) adds that the failure to name a single central location is intentional:

'Far from requiring centralisation in Jerusalem, however ... its refusal to name any one place is ... of the essence of the programme. Israel shall worship only YHWH, not other gods, and they shall do so at his behest.'

In Deuteronomy, the place that the Lord would choose is at home in the broader call to love YHWH and submit to Him – and may be fulfilled in a succession of locations if the Lord chooses – rather than being a late-monarchic apology for centralisation in Jerusalem.

.....

In conclusion, there may be elements in Deuteronomy that cannot be explained other than that it is influenced by circumstances of the 8th or 7th centuries. However, such references are fewer and more limited than is often supposed, and there are significant details that place the text much earlier too.

7.5.3 Strong structural parallels with Assyrian treaties

Another key argument that drives the consensus towards a late monarchic setting for Deuteronomy is the similarity in structure with Assyrian vassal treaties from the 7th Century. Wenham (1985:15ff) argues that the form of Assyrian treaties is similar to that of Deuteronomy, but there are certain formal *differences* as well. He considers there to be better parallels with 2nd Millennium Hittite treaty documents and the Laws of Hammurapi. Weinfeld also notes a close fit of the form of Deuteronomy to Hittite treaties. He says that Deuteronomy and the Hittite treaties both include an historical introduction describing the prior benevolence of the suzerain, an element usually absent from the Assyrian documents. Assyrian documents tended to exclude lists of blessings upon obedience, which the Hittite treaties include (1991:7f). Weinberg believes that these formal elements can be attributed to a pervasive influence of the Hittite culture on biblical tradition; Deuteronomy adopted the older form as the basic pattern, and then reworked it in conformity with the Assyrian pattern (1991:9). It is plausible enough that a late Deuteronomy might have used the most expedient elements from well-known treaty or legal documents, but given that the Assyrian elements are comparably few, it is no less plausible that an early form of Deuteronomy that was modelled on the then-current Hittite forms was merely updated in the Assyrian period. The seemingly pervasive influence of Hittite forms on later biblical literature for which Weinfeld argues surely may have arisen because early Deuteronomy borrowed Hittite forms and *Deuteronomy* influenced later biblical writers, not the then-passé Hittites.

7.5.4 Conclusion

These then are some of the more common arguments for locating Deuteronomy in the 7th Century, but it is my opinion that they are far too weak to demand acceptance. It seems to me that frequent

and long-standing repetition of the case for a late Deuteronomy has led to it becoming conventional to locate it in the 7th Century, rather than the evidence itself having been persuasive enough to establish such a consensus.

Deuteronomy shares structural features with 2nd Millennium BC documents; it legislates for social circumstances that are pre-monarchic; subsequent biblical literature shows a high degree of dependence upon it; and it claims to be Mosiac in content. It seems prone to fewer difficulties and assumptions, and a better fit of available evidence to see it as an early text that underwent a process of updating.

The speculation that I will add – and have to rely on – is that later editors were not destructive of the original ideas when updating and expanding. For example, the curses in the book speak quite specifically of exile and return. I have no quarrels with the idea that Moses might have spoken prophetically of this event, but if we take for granted that it was the work of an editor who knew of the exile, I am assuming that he over-wrote specific information onto Moses' more general warnings of being cast from the land.²¹⁹ I am assuming that redaction was done with enough integrity to allow us to make observations about Israel's early history on the basis of the book of Deuteronomy, even though there are late revisions of the content.

Thus, the *Sitz im Leben* of Deuteronomy adopted in this study is pre-monarchic Israel with an eye on future contact points with later prophets and kings. I take Deuteronomy to be an early covenantal or constitutional document refining the meaning and application of the Decalogue to settled national life in Canaan.

I have no problem with the biblical testimony that Moses recorded a covenant document of some kind. This may have been the original basis of Deuteronomy and may have informed Israel's cultural and social life from its earliest days, at least from an official standpoint. In practice, Israel's preference for kinship-based social organisation²²⁰ may have seen the influence of the covenant code vary from place to place. I am aware that this position suffers from lack of physical evidence to confirm it, but it has at least the witness of the text itself behind it, and absence of evidence is at least not evidence to the contrary.

²¹⁹ I am also assuming that it is possible for God to have spoken to an historical Patriarch and promised him the land of Canaan. If this promise was historical and if the land was so central to Israel's religious identity, then it is the most obvious (and most serious) punishment to threaten that the people would be cast from the land as a reversal of the Exodus. There would be nothing anachronistic about putting this warning in the mouth of Moses, even if we doubt that he would have been able to be as specific as what appears in the final form of Deuteronomy.

²²⁰ This is commonly how Israel is said to have been organised, as for example in Wright (2004:55).

7.6 APPENDIX F: JEREMIAH 32 GRAMMATICAL DIAGRAM

1 The word that was to Jeremiah from YHWH
in the tenth year of Zedekiah King of Judah;
it was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar.

הַדְבָר אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה אֶל-יִרְמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה²²¹
בְּשָׁנָה²²² הָעֲשָׂרִית²²³ לְצִדְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה
הָיָה הַשָּׁנָה שְׁמֹנֶה-עָשָׂר שָׁנָה לְנְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר:

2 And at that time
the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem;
and Jeremiah the prophet was being restrained
in the prison court,
which was the house of the king of Judah,

וְאֵז²²⁴
חֵיל מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל צָרִים²²⁵ עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם
וַיִּרְמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא הָיָה כָּלֹא²²⁶
בְּחֶצֶר הַמִּטְרָה²²⁷
אֲשֶׁר בֵּית-מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה:

3 for Zedekiah King of Judah had restrained him, saying,

אֲשֶׁר כָּלֹא²²⁸ צִדְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר

“For what reason are you prophesying saying
‘Thus says YHWH
“Behold,

מִדּוּעַ²²⁹ אַתָּה נֹבֵא²³⁰ לֵאמֹר *
כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה *
הִנְנִי *

I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon,
and he will capture her.

נָתַן אֶת-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת בְּיַד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל
וְלָכְדָּהּ²³¹:

²²¹ Prep מִן + def. object marker

²²² Prep בִּי + NFS construct שָׁנָה ‘year’

²²³ Def Art + Fem Adj עֲשִׂירִי ‘tenth’

²²⁴ Adverb אֵז ‘at that time’

²²⁵ Plural Participle צָרִים ‘to besiege, shut in, confine’

²²⁶ Passive Participle כָּלֹא ‘shut up, restrain, withhold’

²²⁷ From מִטְרָה ‘guard, prison, guardhouse’

²²⁸ Qal 3ms כָּלֹא ‘shut up, restrain, withhold’ + suffix 3ms

²²⁹ Adverb ‘For what reason, why?’

²³⁰ Niphal Qatal 3ms, or Participle נֹבֵא ‘to prophesy’

²³¹ Waw + Qal Qatal 3ms לָכְדָּהּ ‘capture, seize, take’ + suffix 3fs (prophetic past tense – guaranteed future event)

4 And Zedekiah King of Judah will not escape
from the hand of the Chaldeans
but he will surely be given
into the hand of the king of Babylon
and his mouth will speak with his mouth
and his eyes shall see his eyes.

וְצִדְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה לֹא יִמָּלֵט²³²
מִיַּד הַכַּשְׂדִּים
כִּי הִנָּתַן²³³ בְּיַד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל
וְדִבֶּר-פִּיו עִם-פִּיו
וְעֵינָיו אֶת-עֵינָיו תִּרְאֶינָה:

5 And to Babylon he will cause Zedekiah to walk
And there he will be until I visit him,”
says YHWH,

וּבָבֶל יֵלֶךְ²³⁴ אֶת-צִדְקִיָּהוּ
וְשָׁם יִהְיֶה עַד-פָּקְדִי אֹתוֹ
נְאֻם-יְהוָה

“Though you fight the Chaldeans,
you shall not prosper”?”

כִּי תִלָּחֲמוּ אֶת-הַכַּשְׂדִּים *
לֹא תִצְלִיחוּ²³⁵: פ + + +

6 And Jeremiah said,
“The word of YHWH came to me saying,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְרֵמְיָהוּ
* הָיָה דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

7 ‘Behold,
Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle will come to you saying,
“Buy for yourself my field that is in Anathoth
because to you is the right of redemption to buy it.”

הִנֵּה *
חֲנַמֶּל בֶּן-שָׁלֹם דִּידְךָ בָּא אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר
* קִנְיָה לָךְ אֶת-שָׂדֵי אֲשֶׁר בַּעַנְתּוֹת
+ + כִּי לָךְ מִשְׁפָּט הַנִּזְלָה לְקִנּוֹת:

8 And Hanamel my cousin came to me,
as YHWH said,
in the prison court,
and he said to me,

וַיָּבֹא אֵלַי חֲנַמֶּל בֶּן-דָּדַי
כַּדְבַּר יְהוָה
אֶל-חֲצֵר הַמִּשְׁפָּחָה
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי

²³² Niphal Yiqtol 3ms מִלֵּט ‘escape, slip away’

²³³ Niphal inf. abs. נָתַן

²³⁴ Waw + Qal Yiqtol 3ms הֵלֵךְ ‘to go, come, walk’

²³⁵ Hiphil Yiqtol 2mp צָלַח ‘to prosper’

“Please buy my field that is in Anathoth
that is in the land of Benjamin
because to you is the right of possession
and to you the redemption.
Buy it for yourself.”
and I knew that his was the word of YHWH

* קנה נא את שְׂדֵי אֲשֶׁר־בְּעִנְתוֹת
אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ בִּנְיָמִין
כִּי־לְךָ מִשְׁפָּט הִירָשָׁה²³⁶
וְלְךָ הַגְּאֻלָּה
+ קִנְה־לְךָ
וְאֵדַע כִּי דְבַר־יְהוָה הוּא:

9 And I bought the field from Hanamel my cousin
that is in Anathoth
and I weighed out to him the money:
seven-and-ten shekels of silver.

וָאֶקְנִה אֶת־הַשָּׂדֶה מֵאֵת חֲנַמֶּל בֶּן־דָּדִי
אֲשֶׁר בְּעִנְתוֹת
וָאֲשַׁקְלָה²³⁷ לוֹ אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף
שִׁבְעָה שָׁקָלִים וְעֶשְׂרֵה הַכֶּסֶף:

10 And I signed the scroll and sealed it
and I caused witnesses to bear witness
and I weighed the silver in the scales.

וָאֶכְתַּב בְּסֵפֶר²³⁸ וָאֶחַתָּם²³⁹
וָאָעֵד²⁴⁰ עֲדִים
וָאֲשַׁקֵּל הַכֶּסֶף בַּמֶּאֱזָנִים²⁴¹:

11 Then I took the scroll of the purchase
the sealed commandment and prescriptions
and the opened one

וָאֶקַח | אֶת־סֵפֶר הַמִּקְנָה
| אֶת־הַחֲתָמִים²⁴² הַמְצֻנָּה וְהַחֲקִים
| וְאֶת־הַנִּגְלוֹי²⁴³:

12 And I gave the scroll of the purchase to Baruch
son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah
before the eye of Hanamel my cousin
and before the eye of the witnesses
that signed the scroll of purchase
before the eye of all the Jews sitting in the prison court

וָאֶתֵּן אֶת־הַסֵּפֶר הַמִּקְנָה אֶל־בָּרוּךְ
בֶּן־נְרִיָּה בֶּן־מַחֲסִיָּה
לְעֵינַי חֲנַמֶּל דָּדִי
וְלְעֵינַי | הָעֲדִים
| הַכֹּתְבִים בְּסֵפֶר הַמִּקְנָה

²³⁶ Def Art + יִרְשָׁה 'possession'

²³⁷ Waw + Qal Yiqtol 1s שָׁקַל + paragogic ה

²³⁸ Brown Driver Briggs: with סֵפֶר as object of כָּתַב = 'to sign the scroll'; so also v12 and 44

²³⁹ Waw + Qal Yiqtol 1s חָתַם 'to seal'

²⁴⁰ Waw + Hiphil Yiqtol 1s עִיד 'Qal: to repeat, do again, return; Hiphil: bear witness, take as witness, warn'

²⁴¹ From מֶאֱזָן 'scale, balance'

²⁴² Article + Qal Ptc MS חָתַם 'to seal'

²⁴³ Def Art + Qal participle mp גִּלָּה 'to uncover, reveal'

לְעֵינַי כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּחֶצֶר הַמְּטָרָה:

13 And I commanded Baruch before their eye, saying:

“Thus says YHWH of hosts, God of Israel

‘Take these scrolls

this scroll of purchase

and the sealed one

and this opened scroll

and put them in an earthenware vessel

in order that it may stand (be preserved) many days.’

וְאָצְוָה אֶת בָּרוּךְ לְעֵינֵיהֶם לֵאמֹר:

* כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

לָקוּחַ²⁴⁴ אֶת־הַסְּפָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

אֶת סֵפֶר הַמִּקְנָה הַזֶּה

וְאֶת הַחֲתוּם

וְאֶת סֵפֶר הַנִּלְוִי הַזֶּה

וַיִּנְתֵּנָם בְּכֵל־חֶרֶשׁ²⁴⁵

+ לְמַעַן יַעֲמְדוּ יָמִים רַבִּים: ס

15 So thus said YHWH of hosts the God of Israel

“Houses and fields and vineyards will yet be bought in this land.” כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

+* עוֹד יִקְנוּ²⁴⁶ בָּתִּים וּשְׂדוֹת וּכְרָמִים בָּאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת: פ

16 And I prayed to YHWH

after I gave the scroll of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah saying:

וְאֶתְפַּלֵּל²⁴⁷ אֶל־יְהוָה

אַחֲרַי תַּתִּי²⁴⁸ אֶת־סֵפֶר הַמִּקְנָה אֶל־בָּרוּךְ בֶּן־נְרִיָּה לֵאמֹר:

17 Alas, my Lord YHWH, behold,

you made the heavens and the earth

in your great power and with your outstretched arm;

nothing is too difficult for you,

* אַחֲרַי אֲדַגֵּי יְהוָה הִנֵּה

אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ

בְּכַחַתְךָ הַגָּדוֹל וּבְזַרְעֶךָ הַנִּשְׁטוּיָה²⁴⁹

לֹא־יִפְלֹא²⁵⁰ מִמֶּךָ כֹּל־דָּבָר:

18 showing lovingkindness to thousands

and completing/repaying the iniquity of fathers

into the bosom of their sons after them;

the God great and mighty, YHWH of hosts is his name.

עֲשֵׂה²⁵¹ חֶסֶד לְאֲלָפִים

וּמִשְׁלָם²⁵² עֲוֹן אֲבוֹת

אֶל־חֵיק²⁵³ בְּנֵיהֶם אַחֲרֵיהֶם

²⁴⁴ Inf Abs לָקַח ‘to take’; an absolute beginning a sentence can be equivalent to a finite verb (Joüon & Muraoka, 2009:398)

²⁴⁵ חֶרֶשׁ ‘earthenware, potsherd’

²⁴⁶ Niphal Yiqtol 3MP קָנָה ‘to buy’

²⁴⁷ Hitpael Yiqtol 1S פָּלַל (Qal) to intervene, intercede; (Hitpael) to intercede, pray’

²⁴⁸ Qal infinitive נָתַן ‘to give’ + suffix 1s

²⁴⁹ From נָטָה ‘to stretch out’

²⁵⁰ Niphal Yiqtol 3MS פִּלֵּא ‘to be beyond one’s power, difficult, extraordinary, wonderful’

²⁵¹ Qal Ptc MS (abs st) עָשָׂה ‘to make, do’

²⁵² Piel Ptc MS שָׁלַם (Qal) to be complete, sound; (Piel) to complete, to make safe, to make whole, to make good’

²⁵³ bosom

19 Great the counsel and mighty the deed so that your eyes are opened upon all the ways of the sons of Adam/man to give to a man according to his way and the fruit of his works;	הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר יַהֲנֶה צָבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ: גָּדֹל הָעֲצָה וְרַב הָעֲלִילָה ²⁵⁴ אֲשֶׁר-עֵינֶיךָ פָּקַחוֹת ²⁵⁵ עַל-כָּל-דֶּרֶכִי בְנֵי אָדָם לָתֵת לְאִישׁ כְּדֶרְכֹּיו וּכְפָרִי מַעֲלָלָיו ²⁵⁶ :
20 you who put signs and wonders in the land of Egypt until this day and in Israel and in man and you made for yourself a name as this day.	אֲשֶׁר שָׂמַתָּ ²⁵⁷ אֱלֹתֹת וּמִפְתִּים בְּאֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם עַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְאָדָם וַתַּעֲשֶׂה-לָּךְ שֵׁם כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה:
21 And you brought out your people Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and wonders and a mighty hand and with the arm outstretched and with great fear.	וַתֹּצֵא אֶת-עַמְּךָ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֵתוֹת וּבְמוֹפְתִים וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְאֲזִרְוֶה נְמוּיָה ²⁵⁸ וּבְמוֹרָא ²⁵⁹ גָּדוֹל:
22 And you gave to them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give to them, (it is) a land flowing with milk and honey.	וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ ²⁶⁰ לְאֲבוֹתָם לָתֵת לָהֶם אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ:
23 And they went and took possession of it. But they did not hear your voice, and according to your law they did not walk; all that you commanded them to do they did not do. Therefore you have called upon them all this evil.	וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֹתָהּ וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלֶךָ וּבְתִרְוָתְךָ לֹא-הִלְכוּ אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָה ²⁶¹ לָהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת לֹא עָשׂוּ וַתִּקְרָא אֲתָם אֵת כָּל-הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת:

²⁵⁴ Def art + Fem pl noun 'deed'. The unusual form can be accounted for as an abstract ending (Lundbom, 2004:513).

²⁵⁵ Qal Pf Ptc FP פָּקַח 'to open (eyes or ears)'

²⁵⁶ From מַעֲלָל 'work, deed, endeavour'

²⁵⁷ Qal Pf 2MS שִׁמַּת 'to put, place'

²⁵⁸ From נָתַח 'to stretch'

²⁵⁹ From מוֹרָא 'fear, terror'

²⁶⁰ Niphal Pf. 2MS נִשְׁבַּע 'to swear'

²⁶¹ Piel Pf. 2MS צִוִּיתָה 'to command'

24 Behold,
the (siege) mounds have come up to the city
to take it,
and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans
who are fighting against it,
from the face of sword and famine and pestilence,
and what you spoke has come to be; behold, you can see (it).

הִנֵּה
הַסִּלְלוֹת²⁶² בָּאוּ הָעִיר
לְלַכְדָּה²⁶³
וְהָעִיר נְתָנָה בְּיַד הַכַּשְׁדִּים
הַנִּלְחָמִים עָלֶיהָ
מִפְּנֵי הַחֶרֶב וְהָרָעָב וְהַדָּבָר
וְאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ הָיָה וְהִנֵּה רָאָה:

25 And you have said to me, O Lord YHWH,
“Buy for yourself the field with money and let witnesses witness it,”
yet the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.”

וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֵלַי אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה
קְנֵה-לָךְ תְּשָׁרָה בְּכֶסֶף וְהָעִיר²⁶⁴ יָעִיד
וְהָעִיר נְתָנָה בְּיַד הַכַּשְׁדִּים: + +

26 The word of YHWH came to Jeremiah, saying:

וַיְהִי דִבְרֵי-יְהוָה אֶל-יִרְמְיָהוּ לֵאמֹר:

27 “Behold, I am YHWH, the God of all flesh.
Is anything too difficult for me?

הִנֵּה אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי כָל-בָּשָׂר *
הַמְּמֻנִי²⁶⁵ יִפְלֵא²⁶⁶ כָּל-דָּבָר: +

28 Therefore, thus says YHWH:

לֵכֵן כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

Behold, I give this city
into the hand of the Chaldeans
and the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,
and he will take it.

* הִנְנִי נֹתֵן אֶת-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת
בְּיַד הַכַּשְׁדִּים
בְּיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל
וְלָקְחָהּ:

²⁶² From סִלְלָה (siege) mound'

²⁶³ Prefix + Qal infinitive לָכַד 'to capture, seize, take' + 3FS suffix

²⁶⁴ Waw + Hiphil Yiqtol 1s עוֹד 'Qal: to repeat, do again, return; Hiphil: bear witness, take as witness, warn'

²⁶⁵ Interrogative + מִן + Suffix 1S comparative 'too, than'

²⁶⁶ Niphal Pf. 3MS פִּלֵּא 'to be beyond one's power, difficult, extraordinary, wonderful'

29 The Chaldeans fighting against this city will come
and set this city on fire,
and they will burn it and the houses
that have offered incense upon their roofs to Baal
and have poured out libations to other gods,
in order to provoke me.

וּבָאוּ הַכַּשְׁדִּים הַנִּלְחָמִים עַל־הָעִיר הַזֹּאת
וְהָצִיתוּ²⁶⁷ אֶת־הָעִיר הַזֹּאת בָּאֵשׁ
וְשָׂרְפוּ²⁶⁸ וְאֵת הַבָּתִּים

אֲשֶׁר קָטְרוּ עַל־נְנוֹתֵיהֶם²⁶⁹ לְבַעַל
וְהִסְכוּ²⁷⁰ נִסְכִּים לְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
לְמַעַן הַכְּעִסְנִי²⁷¹:

30 For the children of Israel and the children
of Judah have been doing only evil
in my eyes
from their youth.

כִּי־הָיוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה אֵךְ עֲשִׂים הָרַע
מִנְעֻרְתֵּיהֶם²⁷² בְּעֵינַי

For the children of Israel have only been provoking me
by the work of their hands,
declares YHWH.

כִּי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵךְ מְכַעְסִים אֹתִי
בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם
נְאֻם־יְהוָה:

31 For a cause of my anger and a cause of my rage
this city has become to me
from the day they built it until this day
so that it should be removed from before my face.

כִּי עַל־אַפִּי וְעַל־חֲמָתִי²⁷³ הָיְתָה לִי הָעִיר הַזֹּאת
לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ אוֹתָהּ וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
לְהִסְרָהּ²⁷⁴ מִעַל פָּנָי:

32 because of all the evil of the sons of Israel
and the sons of Judah
that they did to provoke me –
their kings, their princes,
their priests, and their prophets,
the men of Judah and those dwelling in Jerusalem.

עַל־כָּל־רָעַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה
אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לְהַכְעִסְנִי
הָמָּה מְלָכֵיהֶם שָׂרֵיָהֶם כְּהֹנֵיהֶם וּנְבִיאֵיהֶם
וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה וְיֹשְׁבֵי־יְרוּשָׁלַם²⁷⁵:

²⁶⁷ From יָצַה 'to kindle, burn'

²⁶⁸ Conj + Qal Pf 3P שָׂרַף 'to burn' + Suffix 3FS

²⁶⁹ FP of נָגַד 'roof of a house, top of altar of incense' + Suffix 3MP

²⁷⁰ Hiphil Pf 3P נָסַךְ 'to pour out (libations)'

²⁷¹ Hiphil infinitive (defective form) כָּעַס 'to provoke' + Suffix 1S

²⁷² Prep + Hiphil Inf. נְעוּרֵיהֶם Fem Pl 'youth' + Suffix 2MP

²⁷³ From חָמָה (fem) 'rage'

²⁷⁴ Prep + Hiphil Inf. Constr. סָרַר 'to turn aside, remove' + Suffix 3FS

²⁷⁵ Qal Participle Active יָשַׁב 'to sit, dwell'

33 They have turned to me their back and not their face.
And I have taught them again (and again),
but they have not listened to take discipline.

וַיִּפְנוּ²⁷⁶ אֵלַי עֲרֹף²⁷⁷ וְלֹא פָנִים
וְלִמַּד²⁷⁸ אֹתָם הַשָּׁבָם²⁷⁹ וְלֹא
וְאֵינָם שֹׁמְעִים לְקַחַת מוֹסֵר²⁸⁰.

34 They set up their detestable (idols) in the house
that is called by my name,
in order to defile it.

וַיִּשְׁמְנוּ²⁸¹ שְׁקוּצִיָּהֶם²⁸² בְּבֵית
אֲשֶׁר-נִקְרָא שְׁמִי עָלָיו
לְטַמְּאוֹ²⁸³.

35 They built the high places of Baal
that are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom,
in order to cause their sons and daughters
to pass through to Molech,
which I did not command
and neither did it enter into my heart (mind),
In order to do this abomination,
to cause Judah to sin.

וַיִּבְנוּ²⁸⁴ אֶת-בָּמוֹת הַבַּעַל
אֲשֶׁר בְּנֵיא²⁸⁵ בֶּן-הַנֶּחֱם
לְהַעֲבִיר²⁸⁶ אֶת-בָּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת-בָּנוֹתֵיהֶם לְמֹלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-צִוִּיתִים
וְלֹא עָלְתָה²⁸⁷ עַל-לִבִּי
לַעֲשׂוֹת הַתּוֹעֵבָה²⁸⁸ הַזֹּאת
לְמַעַן הַחֲטִי' ²⁸⁹ אֶת-יְהוּדָה: ס

36 Now therefore thus says YHWH,
the God of Israel,
to this city
of which you (pl) are saying,

וַעֲתָה לֵכֵן כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת
אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים

²⁷⁶ From פָּנָה 'to turn'

²⁷⁷ עֲרֹף 'neck, back (of neck)'

²⁷⁸ Piel inf constr לִמַּד '(Qal) to learn; (Piel) to teach'

²⁷⁹ Hiphil inf abs שָׁבָם 'to start, rise (early), again'

²⁸⁰ Masculine Noun: 'discipline, chastening, correction'

²⁸¹ Qal Yiqtol 3MP שִׁים 'to put, place, set, appoint, establish'

²⁸² From שְׁקוּץ 'abomination, detestable thing'

²⁸³ Prep + Piel Inf constr טָמֵא '(Qal) to be/become unclean; (Piel) to defile' + Suffix 3MS

²⁸⁴ Fem Pl בָּמָה 'high place'

²⁸⁵ From נֵיא 'valley'

²⁸⁶ Prep + Hiphil inf constr עָבַר 'to pass over, by, through'

²⁸⁷ From עָלָה 'to go up, ascend, climb'

²⁸⁸ From תּוֹעֵבָה 'abomination, abhorrent thing'

²⁸⁹ Hiphil inf constr חָטָא 'to sin, miss the mark'

'It has been given into the hand of the king of Babylon
by sword, and by famine, and by pestilence':

נִתְּנָה בְּיַד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל *
בַּחֶרֶב וּבָרָעָב וּבִדְבַר²⁹⁰ +

37 'Behold, I will gather them from all the lands
to which I banished them
in my anger and in my wrath and in great indignation.
I will bring them back to this place,
and I will cause them to dwell in safety.

הִנְנִי *
מִקְבָּצֵם מִכָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת
אֲשֶׁר הִדַּחְתִּים²⁹¹ שָׁם
בְּאַפִּי וּבַחֲמָתִי²⁹² וּבִקְצָף²⁹³ נִדְּוָל
וְהִשְׁבַּתִּים²⁹⁴ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
וְהִשְׁבַּתִּים²⁹⁵ לְבֶטַח²⁹⁶:

38 And they shall be to me a people, and I shall be to them God.

וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶתְהִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים:

39 I will give them one heart
and one way,
in order that they may fear me all the days,
for good to them and to their children after them.

וְנָתַתִּי | לָהֶם לֵב אֶחָד
וְחֶדֶד אֶחָד
לִירְאָה²⁹⁷ אוֹתִי כָּל-הַיָּמִים
לְטוֹב לָהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

40 I will cut with them an eternal covenant,
that I will not turn away from after them
to do good to them.

וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם²⁹⁸
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-אָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם
לְהִיטִיב²⁹⁹ אוֹתָם

And I will put the fear (emphatic position) of me in their hearts,
in order that they do not turn aside from (after) me.

וְאֶת-יְרֵאָתִי אֶתֵּן בְּלִבָּם
לְבִלְתִּי³⁰⁰ סוּר מֵעָלַי:

²⁹⁰ Noun דְּבַר 'plague, pestilence'

²⁹¹ Hiphil Pf 3S נִדְּוָל 'to thrust out, banish, drive out' + Suffix 3P

²⁹² Noun חֲמָה 'heat, wrath'

²⁹³ Noun קֶצֶף 'foam, wrath, indignation'

²⁹⁴ Hiphil Pf 1M שׁוּב 'turn back, return; (Hiphil) bring back, cause to return' + Suffix 3MP

²⁹⁵ Hiphil Pf 1M יָשַׁב 'to sit, dwell' + Suffix 3MP

²⁹⁶ Noun בֶּטַח 'safety, security, quietness'

²⁹⁷ Prep + Qal inf constr יִרְאָ 'to fear'

²⁹⁸ Adjective עוֹלָם 'everlasting, eternal'

²⁹⁹ Prep + Hiphil inf constr 1S יִטֵּב

³⁰⁰ Prep + Particle of negation / adverb בְּלִתִּי 'no, except'

41 I will rejoice to do good to them,
and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness,
with all my heart and all my soul.

וּשְׂשִׁיתִי³⁰¹ עֲלֵיהֶם לַהֲטִיב אוֹתָם
וְנִטְעֵתִים³⁰² בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת בְּאֵמֶת
בְּכָל-לִבִּי וּבְכָל-נַפְשִׁי: ס +

42 For thus says YHWH:

כִּי-כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה

Just as I have brought to this people
all this great evil, so I am bringing upon them all the good
that I promise to them.

כַּאֲשֶׁר הֵבֵאתִי³⁰³ אֶל-הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶת כָּל-הָרָעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת *
כֵּן אֲנִכִּי מֵבִיא³⁰⁴ עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת-כָּל-הַטּוֹבָה
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי דֹבֵר עֲלֵיהֶם: +

43 And the field shall be bought in this land
of which you are saying,
'It is a desolation, with neither man nor beast;
it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.'

וְנִקְנְהָ הַשָּׂדֶה בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת
אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים
שְׁמָמָה³⁰⁵ הִיא מֵאִין אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה *
נִתְּנָה בְּיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים: +

44 Fields shall be bought with money,
and scrolls shall be signed and sealed and witnessed by witnesses,
in the land of Benjamin, in the surrounds of Jerusalem,
and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the hill (country),
in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb;
for I will restore their fortunes, says YHWH."

שָׂדוֹת בְּכֶסֶף יִקְנוּ
וְכָתוּב³⁰⁶ בְּסֶפֶר וְחָתוּם³⁰⁷ וְהָעֵד עֲדִים
בְּאֶרֶץ בִּנְיָמִן וּבְסָבִיב³⁰⁸ יְרוּשָׁלַם
וּבְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְעָרֵי הַהָר
וּבְעָרֵי הַשְּׁפֵלָה וּבְעָרֵי הַנֶּגֶב
כִּי-אָשִׁיב אֶת-שְׁבוּתָם³⁰⁹ נָאִם יְהוָה: פ +

³⁰¹ From שׂוּשׁ 'to rejoice, exult'

³⁰² Qal Pf 1S נִטַּע 'to plant' + Suffix 3MP

³⁰³ Hiphil Pf 1S בּוֹא 'to come, go in; (Hiphil) cause to come; [followed by עַל] 'bring against; [followed by אֶל] 'bring to/upon'

³⁰⁴ Hiphil part. MS id

³⁰⁵ Feminine noun שְׁמָמָה 'desolation, waste, devastation'

³⁰⁶ Infinitive absolute; with בְּסֶפֶר = 'to sign'

³⁰⁷ Infinitive absolute from חָתַם 'to seal'

³⁰⁸ From סָבִיב 'surrounds; [prep] in a circuit, round about, on every side'

³⁰⁹ Noun שְׁבוּת 'captivity, fortune'; either 'return their captives' or 'restore their fortunes'.

7.7 APPENDIX G: PSALM 128 GRAMMATICAL DIAGRAM

1 A song of ascents.

Good fortune of everyone (who) fears YHWH

Who walks in his ways.

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת³¹⁰
אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה³¹¹ כָּל־יִרְאֵה יְהוָה
תִּהְיֶה בְּדַרְכָּיו:

2 The labour of your hands surely you shall eat,

Your good fortune,

and good (things) to you.

וְיִנְיַע³¹² כַּפְיָךְ כִּי־תֹאכַל³¹³
אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה³¹⁴
וְטוֹב לָךְ:

3 Your wife like a fruitful vine

In the recesses of your house

Your sons like olive shoots

Around your table.

אֲשֶׁתְּךָ כַּנֶּפֶן³¹⁵ פְּרִיָּה³¹⁶
בִּירְכֶתִי³¹⁷ בֵּיתְךָ
בְּנוֹתֶיךָ כַּשֹּׁתִלִּים³¹⁸ זֵיתִים³¹⁹
סָבִיב לְשֻׁלְחָנְךָ³²⁰:

4 Behold, surely thus shall the man be blessed who fears YHWH.

הִנֵּה כִּי־בֵן יְבָרַךְ³²¹ נָבֶרֶךְ³²² יִרְאֵה יְהוָה:

³¹⁰ Def art + fem noun common plural מַעֲלָה 'step, stair, ascent'

³¹¹ Noun MP construct 'blessedness, happiness, good fortune'.

³¹² Noun MS construct יִנְיַע 'labour, toil; (result of toil) product, possessions'

³¹³ Dahood (1970:228) identifies כִּי as an emphatic particle ('indeed you shall eat'). Alter (2007:451) prefers to render it 'when', which brings it into tidier relationship with the line that follows, but the use of כִּי again in verse 4 seems to support the emphatic use.

³¹⁴ Noun MP + suffix 2ms

³¹⁵ Noun CS נֶפֶן 'vine'

³¹⁶ Qal Ptc Act FS פְּרִיָּה 'to bear fruit, be fruitful'

³¹⁷ Prep + Noun dual fem. construct. יְרִכָה 'flank, side, rear, extreme parts, innermost parts, remote parts'

³¹⁸ Prep + Noun MP construct שֹׁתִלִּי 'shoot [of a plant]'

³¹⁹ Noun MP זֵית 'olive tree';

³²⁰ Prep + Noun MS construct שֻׁלְחָן 'table' + Suffix 2MS

³²¹ Pual imperfect 3MS בָּרַךְ 'to bless'

³²² Noun MS נָבֶרֶךְ 'man (often as distinguished from household members under his protection)' (Whittaker, pg 149)

5 May YHWH bless you from Zion

Look upon / enjoy the good of Jerusalem

All the days of your life.

6 Look at the children of your children.

Well-being upon Israel.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן ³²³

וְרָאָה ³²⁴ בְּטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם

כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

וְרָאָה בָנִים לְבָנֶיךָ

שָׁלוֹם עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל:

³²³ Piel imperfect 3MS + Suffix 2MS (jussive in meaning)

³²⁴ Qal imperative MS רָאָה 'to see'

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